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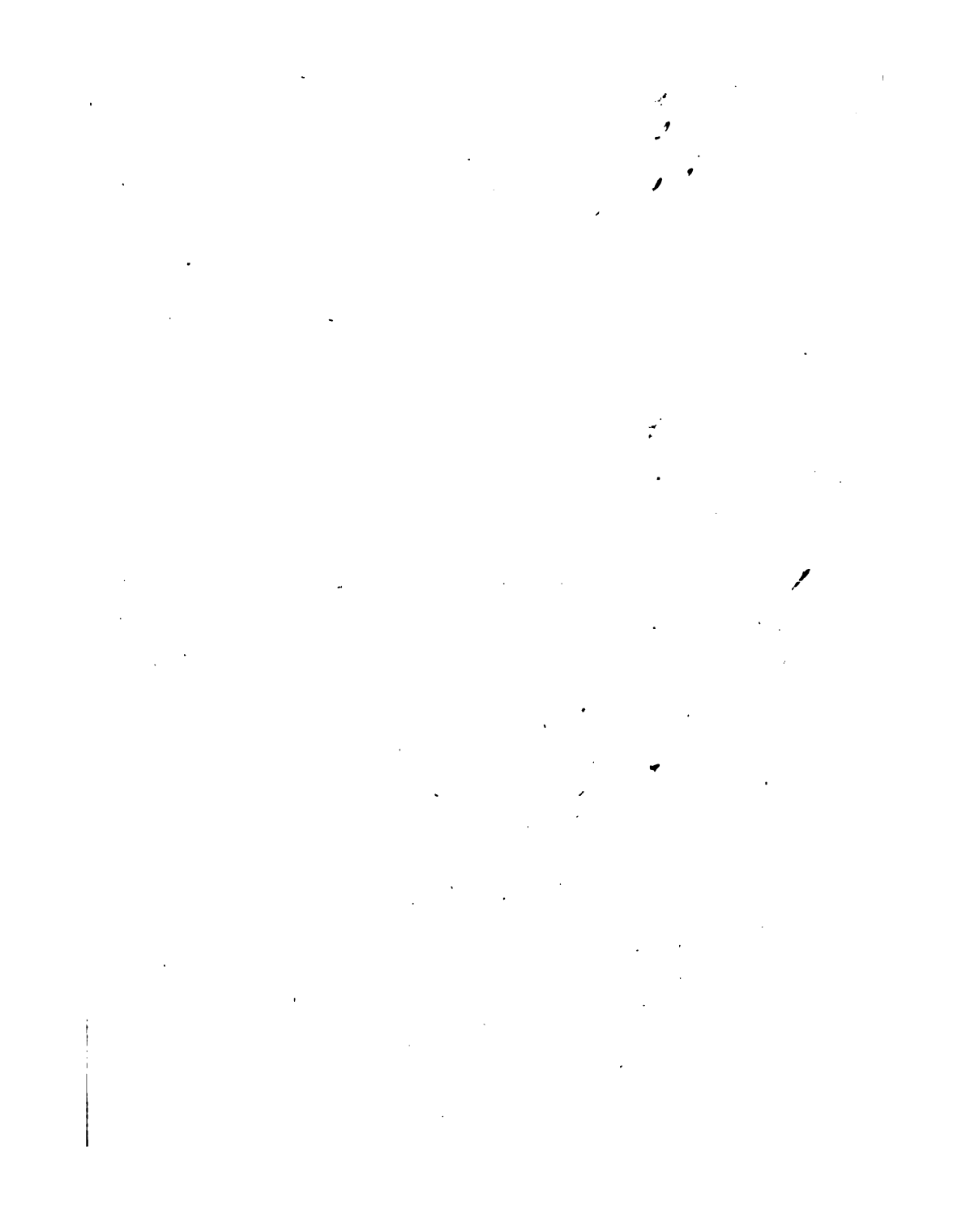
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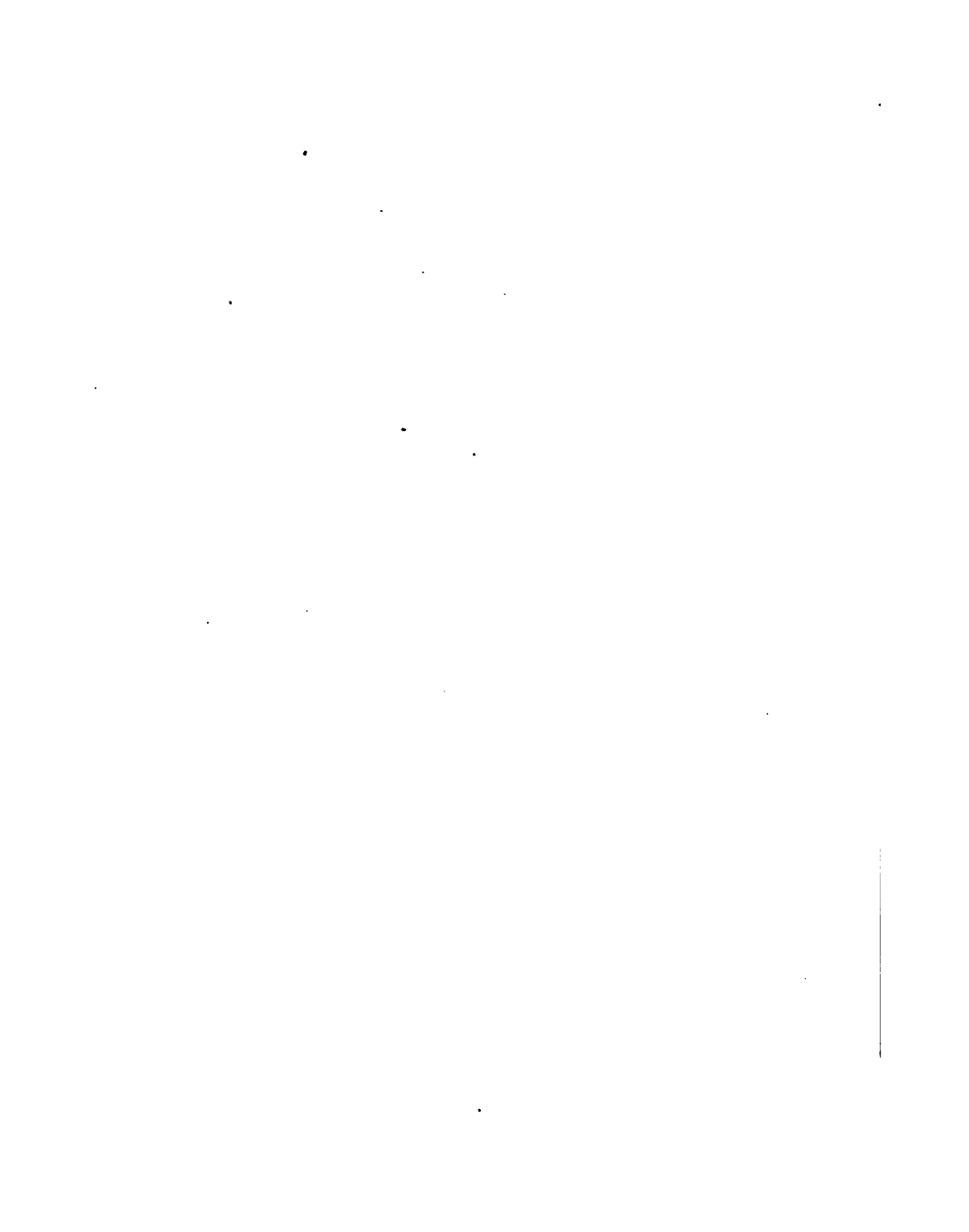






ALYPIUS OF TAGASTE.







CHRISTIAN MARTYRS IN THE CIRCUS AT ALEXANDRIA.—PAGE 29.

ALYPIUS OF TAGASTE:

A Tale of the Early Church.

BY MRS. WEBB.



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PREFACE.

THE scene of the following historical tale is laid at a time when, Christianity having become the dominant religion of the empire, had yet but very imperfectly leavened the great masses of society. The remoter provinces which owned the imperial sway were scarcely touched by the Gospel. In the rural districts idolatry still held its ground openly and defiantly. Throughout the great centres of commerce and civilisation a profession of faith in Christianity was common, but even there the ancient deities had numerous votaries. The "wise of this world" still treated the Gospel with contempt and scorn. The hostility of the Jews was more bitter and unscrupulous than ever. And that large class of the community which, in every age, declares that "the former days were better than these," resented the introduction of Christianity as a troublesome innovation.

If the Church had enjoyed internal purity and peace it might have encountered these numerous foes with serene and triumphant confidence. But "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" was no longer possessed. Multitudes now assumed the profession of Christianity without renouncing the vices and crimes to which they had been addicted under heathenism. At the same time innumerable heresies sprang up, rending the Church into sects and parties, and absorbing,

in profitless controversies, those energies which would otherwise have been devoted to the conversion of unbelievers. So bitter and relentless were the hostilities thus excited, that professed Christians were found leaguings themselves with heathens and Jews in the persecution of their brethren. There are few more painful pages in the history of the Church than those which record the sufferings endured by the orthodox believers at the hands of the Arian schismatics.

Yet God has never left himself without a witness. In Israel of old, when the prophet supposed that "he only was left," there were "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." So, in that dark and troubled time, though "the love of many waxed cold," and multitudes were "entangled again with the yoke of bondage," there were not a few, faithful amongst the faithless, who stood steadfast amidst wide-spread apostasy. Of the struggles and trials of this little band a picture is given in the following pages.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that Monica, Augustine, and his friend Alypius, who form the central group in the *tableau*, have been drawn with careful attention to the ample biographical details furnished by Augustine himself. The element of fiction has been used throughout as sparingly as possible: it forms little more than a thread on which to string truthful delineations of the manners and customs of the time.

ALYPIUS OF TAGASTE.

CHAPTER I.

THE sun rose upon a busy scene in the streets of Alexandria one glorious summer morning in the latter part of the fourth century. The great main street, which ran from the eastern extremity of the city to the Necropolis at the western end, a distance of thirty stadia, was thronged already with eager citizens, mostly arrayed in holiday costume, and with an expression of expectation on their animated countenances. Still more crowded was the wide intersecting street which crossed the longer one at right angles, nearly from north to south, and afforded, as it was intended to do, a free passage to the cool northern breezes, for the ventilation of the populous city. Down this street one continuous stream of chariots, and horses, and foot passengers flowed noisily towards the port on the Mareotic Lake, but not for any aquatic purposes. No gaily-decked galleys waited to bear these pleasure-seekers over the smooth and glittering waters of the lake. The stream of human beings did not flow down the marble steps which led to the water's edge, but took a southward direction across the plain, and formed an almost unbroken line along the road which led to the Circus, situated about a mile below the city.

The Roman Prefect had proclaimed a holiday for his subjects of all nations and all creeds; for truly Alexandria numbered a vast variety of both among her permanent inhabitants, as well as among the visitors who came from distant provinces on such joyful occasions as that of which we now speak.

And what was that occasion? And why was Alexander's city now like a hive of bees when the countless swarm pours forth into the sunshine as an escort to their queen? Let some individuals of the human swarm reply to the query.

"It will be a brave show to-day, Julius," said a young man to his friend and fellow-student at the school of rhetoric and philosophy at Alexandria, as they turned together out of a by-street into the crowded thoroughfare. "My heart beats high at the thought of the deeds that we are about to witness, and I am impatient to reach the Circus, and secure a seat on the front benches. I would see it all; and yet I tremble a little when I picture to myself the ghastly wounds, and the flowing blood, and the dying struggles of man and beast. I hardly know, in this case, which will be the nobler animal of the two."

Julius laughed somewhat derisively, and replied: "The quadruped, surely; for the bipeds will only be the hired ruffians, and a herd of Lybian captives, whose doom of death will be executed in this approved manner for the amusement of the good people of Alexandria. Perhaps, by way of a crowning pleasure, we may have two or three of these caitiff Christians brought on the stage, and given up to the sport of the tigers or the gladiators. I know that our good and loyal Prefect has several of the hated sect in his strongholds; and as he has intimated that this is to be a superlatively grand entertainment,

I make no doubt it will close with a display of martyrdom, as they call it."

His friend, Alypius, slightly started, and drew his arm hastily from that of Julius. Then, having made a pretence of arranging the folds of his upper robe, he again placed his hand on his companion's arm, and said, though with some hesitation—

"I will not stay in the Circus to see my fellow-creatures torn to pieces for no crime but that of worshipping a different god from those whom I have been taught to serve. The Lybian prisoners must abide the chances of war. They knew what to expect when they took up arms against the imperial government. But these Christians are not criminals. On the contrary, Rome has no better subjects, no truer adherents, than the members of this maligned and persecuted sect. Their noble courage, and unexampled patience, would almost lead one to believe that they are sustained by Divine strength, and are trusting in a Divine Master."

It was now Julius's turn to start. He almost stopped; but the increasing throng of passengers on the raised footway carried him on unconsciously. He turned, however, and looked keenly in Alypius' face. The open and ingenuous expression which he there met seemed to reassure him; for he smiled, and pressed the arm of his friend as he exclaimed, "Well, when you talked so, I began to fear that either your brain was wandering, or your faith was wavering. But no; I see in those clear, honest eyes that all is right with you; and it is only that over-tender heart of yours that leads you to pity the brutes, both human and feline, and even to sympathize with the Nazarenes, who are more pernicious than either. Why, Alypius,

my friend, you should have been born a woman. Your gentleness might put many of our dames and maidens to shame; but then your courage and your talents are an example to all our youths, and chiefly to myself, most noble Alypius."

Cheerfully and sportively Julius spoke; but there was truth in what he said; and he had correctly sketched the character of his friend. Alypius was indeed endued with warm and affectionate feelings, and a degree of sympathy for suffering, which more commonly belongs to the gentler sex. But his whole character was manly, and his abilities far above the common level. He was, in every respect, the superior of Julius; and yet their tastes and pursuits were similar, and while they studied together in the schools, a mutual friendship had sprung up between them. Julius was a native of Alexandria, where his parents had long resided, and where he hoped by-and-bye to establish himself as a teacher of philosophy. Alypius was only a stranger and sojourner in the city, and had come thither from Tagaste, a small town near Carthage, for the purpose of completing his education in the capital of Lower Egypt.

Tagaste was, at the time of which we now speak, a town of little note; but ere long it became distinguished as the birth-place of the great Augustine, afterwards Bishop of Hippo. This celebrated man was born at Tagaste, in November 353, about five years before Alypius saw the light. Their respective mothers were neighbours and friends; and the boys, notwithstanding the difference in their ages, were companions and playfellows. As they grew up they became separated; for Augustin was sent by his father, Patricius, first to Madensa, and then, in his sixteenth year, to Carthage, to study in the

schools which flourished in each place ; while Alypius remained at home until he was of an age to enter on a course of philosophy under the distinguished teachers at Alexandria.

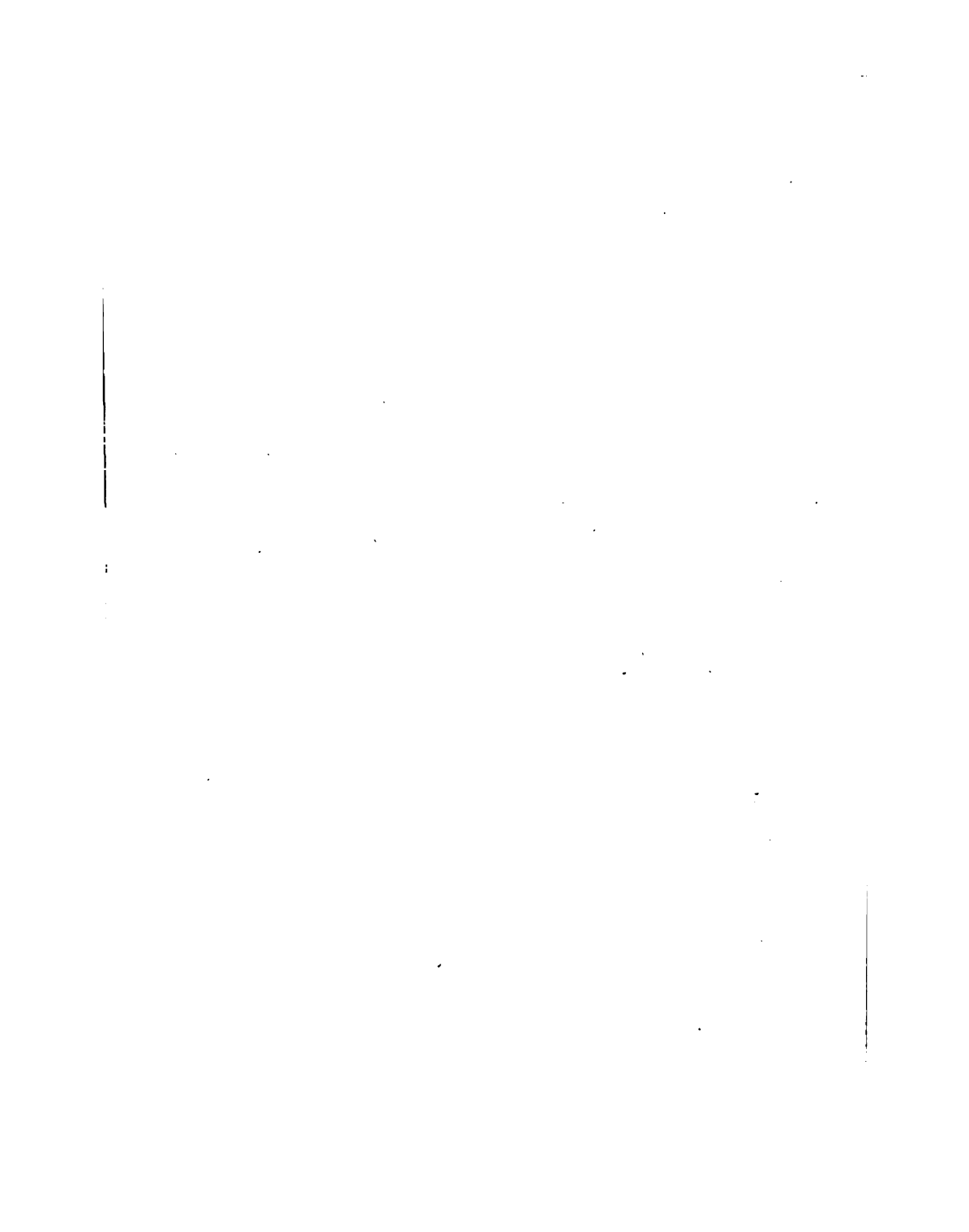
Calanthe, the mother of Alypius, was not a Christian when he left his native town ; and, during his residence in Alexandria, which had now been for two years, he had seen very little of her. But he knew that she was deeply attached to Monica, the mother of Augustin, who was not only a devoted follower of Christ herself, but who, by her prayers, her teaching, and her example, had brought her husband to embrace the same holy faith, and practise the same holy life, some time previous to his death.

Alypius had seen the beauty of Monica's character, and had been drawn towards her by the kindness of her manner, and the charm of her intelligent conversation. Into the tenets of her religion he had never inquired, for all religions had seemed to him of equal value, so long as the professors of each and all lived honourable and upright lives. But he could not hate the disciples of Christ when he knew that Monica was one of the number ; he could not hear unmoved of the cruelty and persecution that was so continually exercised against the lowly followers of the crucified Nazarene, when he knew that his mother's dearest friend worshipped that Man of Sorrows as her Lord and her God, and modelled her pure and useful life on the doctrines and the precepts which he had taught. His own mind was deeply imbued with the errors of a vain philosophy, and with the heathen notions of the innate dignity, and possible purity and perfection of human nature ; and he looked on the Christians as a misguided and superstitious sect.

Fabius, the Prefect who then governed in Alexandria, had made an outward profession of Christianity; but he was still a heathen at heart. He looked down with philosophical contempt and scorn upon every form of religion. To him all faith was superstition, all zeal fanaticism, all earnest belief folly. Some sort of religion, he thought, was needful for the lower orders, and the gods of his forefathers would have answered the purpose very well. He was sorry that any change had been made. The Christians were very troublesome people for him to deal with, and he never missed an opportunity of venting his dislike to them. This the state of affairs in Alexandria enabled him to do. The Arians had now the upper hand. The orthodox believers, who knew Christ as their Saviour and their Lord, were in a minority; and the heretical sect joining with the Jews, the heathens, and the philosophers, gave the Prefect the opportunity he so much desired, of once more seeing Christians cast to the lions, and slain in the amphitheatre.

Nothing could have been more acceptable to the degraded inhabitants of Alexandria than this. The Prefect had long been unpopular amongst them, but the announcement of his intentions had turned the tide of popular feeling in his favour. Therefore Fabius had seized several of the obnoxious persons of both sexes, and of various ages, and had kept them for some months in prison, waiting for a favourable opportunity of offering them up to gratify his own hatred and the malignity of their accusers. We shall see how he carried out his intentions.

Meanwhile, Julius and Alypius were pressing onwards towards the Circus, anxious to obtain seats so near the stage as to enable them to see even the features of the combatants, and to






ALTIUS AND JULIUS MASTERING TO THE GAMES IN THE CIRCUS.—PAGE 14.

watch the expression of their countenances all through the deadly struggle. It was the first time that Alypius had brought himself to be a spectator of these cruel scenes; but Julius had witnessed them both at Alexandria and at other places; and he had painted in such glowing colours to his friend the exquisite excitement which thrilled through the breasts of the spectators, that he had induced him to accompany him to the Circus, and even to feel a strong desire for the animating spectacle, though not unmingled with a shrinking from the sight of human blood and human agony. This shrinking had been greatly increased by the prospect which Julius held out of the games being concluded by the torturing and the death of the Christian prisoners. But Alypius was ashamed to draw back now, and to confess that he could not face a spectacle which high-born and delicately-nurtured ladies sat to witness with delight. So he went on, but with slackening speed, and with what he felt to be a firm resolve to leave the Circus the moment there were any signs that the Christian victims were to be brought on the stage.



CHAPTER II.

“RE you weary with your walk, Alypius?” asked his companion, with rather a contemptuous curl of his lip. “Why are you lagging so, and allowing all these burly citizens and their blooming wives and daughters to pass us by? Are you afraid to get too near the stage, lest the tigers or the Lybians should pass the barrier, and make you their victim?”

The taunt, though uttered in a playful tone, stung Alypius to the quick.

“I am not weary,” he replied, more fiercely than Julius had ever heard him speak; “and I am not faint-hearted either. I believe I could face either the wild beasts or the wilder Lybians in a just and good cause; but I would never torture the bodies of my fellow-creatures in order to control their thoughts and feelings. I will not remain in this Circus if the Christians are to be martyred there.”

“Martyred,” said Julius to himself, as he turned away his head, and smiled, half scornfully, half pitifully, at his friend’s declaration. “He deems them martyrs, then—victims to be pitied—heroes to be admired. May all the gods preserve him from being tainted with their childish and superstitious heresies! But I have my fears.”

The friends were now approaching the Circus, and the crowd became denser and the noise more loud and confusing as they

pressed towards the entrance. Julius was a powerfully-made man, and he worked his way through the crowd with energy and effect. Alypius was taller and slighter, and in any trial of muscular strength he would have proved inferior to his companion; but his spirit was high, and his will determined, and the taunting words of Julius were still ringing in his ears, and he kept close to his friend.

Together they entered the Circus, and together they took their seats; when they found that they had obtained a very advantageous situation for beholding the expected sights.

Although some time had yet to elapse before the commencement of the so-called sports, the vast theatre was rapidly filling with eager spectators, chiefly of the middle and lower classes. For the aristocracy of Alexandria, both foreign and native, seats were reserved in the best positions; and on these, as time wore on, they took their places, looking almost as delightedly expectant as the crowd around them.

Once established in their places, Julius and Alypius amused themselves with observing the fresh arrivals among the upper classes; and in criticizing the dress, appearance, and bearing of their numerous attendants, who remained standing in their rear. Alypius had not yet made many acquaintances among the residents of Alexandria; but Julius was familiar with at least the names of the greater part of those who occupied the seats of honour; and he could, therefore, reply to the repeated queries of his friend, as group after group of gorgeously-attired officials and military officers, accompanied by their richly-dressed wives and daughters, entered the theatre, and were received by the populace with more or less of cheers and greeting, according to

their supposed merits, or the present influence of the political party to which they belonged.

Many of these groups had been watched, and duly commented on by the young friends, and the grace and beauty of some of the fair maidens had won their commendation in various degrees. At length, the appointed time for the commencement of the business and pleasure of the day had nearly arrived, and already the stir of preparation began to be heard and felt. The entrance of the Prefect and his party attracted for awhile all eyes, and absorbed all attention. But the eyes and thoughts of Alypius were not so riveted by the dignity and splendour of the chief magistrate and his suite, as to prevent their being diverted towards another, and very different group, who entered immediately after the Prefect, and quietly took their places at the end of the reserved benches.

This group consisted of a dignified-looking man, whose features and style of dress partook rather of the Egyptian than of the Grecian or Roman type. By his side was a young lady of fair and delicate aspect, attired in the graceful simplicity of a purely Greek costume; her white robe being bordered with gold, in a rich Etruscan pattern, and confined at the waist with a golden girdle clasped with gems. A simple tiara crowned her head, and beneath it her glossy hair of a sunny-brown hue hung down upon her shoulders in rich waving curls. A matron, who looked worthy to be the mother of so lovely a daughter, seemed to guard her with watchful care on the other side; and the party was completed by a young man in an Egyptian sacerdotal dress, whose countenance would have appeared to Alypius very stern and forbidding, if he had been able to look beyond the form of the younger lady, and her two stately supporters.

As it was, he continued to gaze at the unconscious maiden with a sort of reverential admiration. He had seen very little of female society, except that of a few friends of his mother's and Monica's, at the quiet town of Tagaste; and the vision that now appeared before him seemed fit to personate one of the goddesses in whom he had been taught to believe.

"What art you staring at so fixedly?" inquired Julius. "Do you not see that some of the combatants are entering the arena, and preparing for the struggle?" Then following the direction of his friend's eyes, he added, "Ah, I see the attraction; and you may well admire her, for she does look very charming to-day!"

"Have you then seen her before? Do you know her? Who is she?"

"One question at a time, my friend. I have seen her several times before. That is my answer to your first query. I have the privilege of her acquaintance. That is my answer to number two. And my reply to your third question is this: The name of that lovely damsel is Medora. Her father is an Egyptian, named Sophis. Her mother, Marcella, sits on her right hand, like one of the dragons guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides. And that dark-browed youth who stands behind her, and seems to complete her escort, is her brother, Orestes, an Egyptian by birth, and a priest by profession. Sophis is somewhat of a free-thinker, and allows the members of his family to worship what divinities they please, so long as their entire obedience is rendered to himself. Marcella is said to be a very staunch believer in the old gods of Greece; but the fair Medora pays her devotions to Osiris and Isis; and she would have become a priestess at Philæ, where her brother serves in the

great temple, and where she was brought up in the sacred school, if Sophis had not positively forbidden it."

"It would indeed have been a pity if she had been immured in that college for life, as I believe is too often the case," said Alypius, with a sigh. "But how is it that you never mentioned this interesting family to me, Julius?"

"Simply because they were not very interesting to me, I suppose," replied Julius, laughing. "I do not know much of them; they live very retired; and I only became accidentally acquainted with them. This is the first time that I have ever seen Medora at any public entertainment; and, to tell the truth, much as I enjoy these spectacles myself, I am surprised to see her here to-day. I know that she holds the shedding of blood in righteous abhorrence; and she is of so gentle a nature that I am sure she is not here willingly."

"I am glad of it!" exclaimed Alypius. "I would not have missed seeing her for all the prizes of the Academy—but I would rather have seen her elsewhere. Well, I shall observe her as the conflict proceeds. Those clear dark eyes, and that transparent complexion must easily betray her feelings."

"Silence; the Prefect rises!" said Julius; and he forgot Medora in his eagerness to know the plan of the entertainment which the governor had provided for the good people of Alexandria. This plan was proclaimed by a herald, and loudly applauded by the spectators.

The gladiatorial combats, the conflicts with wild beasts, the fight between the Lybian prisoners and their hired assassins, and the festivities which were to close the day, were all detailed; and Alypius held his breath, fearing that a sacrifice of the

Christians would fill up the bloody programme. But Fabius made no mention of them; and his fears subsided. All the other conflicts seemed as nothing to that which he had dreaded; and his thoughts reverted to Medora, and the trial which her tender feelings and sensitive nerves would soon have to endure. He forgot himself in sympathizing with her.

We shrink from entering on the revolting details of those cruel and degrading spectacles, which, in the times of which we now speak, afforded amusement to delicate and gently-nurtured women. All the revolting particulars of the savage combats which were enacted to delight the eyes and rouse the feelings of the Romans and their subject nations, have been so frequently and so graphically described, that we prefer to leave them to the memory or the imagination of our readers; and only to tell of those circumstances which affected the individuals in whom we are interested.

The sports commenced with the usual combats of gladiators, both with the wild beasts—which had been kept fasting in order to render them still more ferocious—and also between themselves; and the results were varying in regard to the conquerors, but unvarying in regard to the applause of the excited spectators.

During these preliminary skirmishes, the devoted Lybian captives stood apart to watch—with what feelings we may well guess—the strength and prowess of the combatants; and to await their own doom. But even they were at times so much carried away by the enthusiasm of the crowd, as to forget their own impending fate, and to join in the cries and shouts which resounded through the Circus at each telling or fatal stroke that

was made by either man or beast. Their dark features expressed the keenest interest; and their wild eyes actually glittered, as with a fiendish joy—more pardonable in them than in the well-dressed occupants of the seats of honour—they gazed on the deadly struggles within the arena. Then again the light would fade from their eyes, and an expression of abject terror would take possession of their countenances; and Alypius, who watched them with deep interest, saw that they anticipated with agony the fearful death that awaited them.

But the attention of Alypius was not engrossed either by the combatants on the stage, or the dusky prisoners at the side of the arena. Often and earnestly he looked at the fair Medora, and saw with satisfaction how her gentler feelings were excited by the dreadful scene, which was as new to her as to himself. Her colour came and went, and at times she started and shuddered, and seemed hardly able to restrain a cry of anguish. But her father spoke to her with an air of authority, and her mother appeared to try and soothe her agitation, and her priestly brother stooped and whispered mysterious words in her ear, and the poor girl sat still; but her cheek grew paler, and her lips more compressed, and her eyes more fixed and stony.

Presently the herald again addressed the spectators, and proclaimed the merciful decree of the Prefect that the Lybian captives should be permitted to fight for their lives with an equal number of hired gladiators, and that those who remained victors should be liberated. This declaration was received both by the prisoners and the populace with violent demonstrations of joy. A new hope, and a new life seemed to animate the Lybians;

and they shook the spears and brandished the swords which were put into their hands, as if to try the worth of the weapons and the strength of their own muscles.

A fresh band of gladiators now took the place of those who had already fought, and who retired from the stage carrying their dead and wounded comrades. The wild beasts were also confined in their dens, and could be seen glaring through the solid bars that confined them, and growling fiercely, as if to express their anger and disappointment at being deprived of their expected prey.

Dreadful was the conflict which now took place. The Lybians fought desperately and furiously, and dealt many a deadly blow at their assailants. But the hired murderers were better armed, and their powerful limbs had not been weakened by imprisonment and hardship, and it was soon quite evident on which side the superiority lay. It was also equally evident on which side the wishes of the Prefect and the generality of the spectators inclined. Every furious onslaught of the gladiators on their almost naked opponents was loudly cheered; and every dark Lybian that fell to the ground, and groaned out his life in blood and agony, was hailed with frantic shouts of joy.

But some there were, even in that assemblage, who felt that the wretched captives had been unfairly dealt with, and that the permission which they had received as a boon, was merely a pretext to lengthen out the dreadful scene, and add to the pleasure of the citizens of Alexandria. Among these were Alypius and Medora. Both were strongly excited by the same feelings of indignation and pity. Unconsciously they sympathized—but the spectacle which they were witnessing, and that

which had preceded it, had a very different effect upon them. In Medora's gentle breast no sentiment arose except unmingled horror and disgust. Deeply she lamented that she had not more firmly resisted the wish of her parents that she should appear in the Circus, even though it might have drawn upon her the anger of her stern father, Sophis. Firmly she resolved that nothing should ever induce her again to be present at such an inhuman exhibition, which she felt assured was altogether repugnant to the spirit of the great Osiris and the benignant Isis, the goddess to whose worship she was especially devoted.

Alypius' natural disposition was hardly less compassionate and averse to cruelty than Medora's; but the creed which he professed, and the philosophy which he followed, and the companions with whom he associated, had all tended to blunt his finer feelings, and give him a certain disregard of human life and human suffering. The passion for blood and destruction—which seems to be innate in the heart of man, however it may be concealed and kept in abeyance by better feelings, and by the restraints of civilization—was not dead within his breast; and the sight of the struggles for life or death (which on that day he witnessed for the first time) aroused in him a tumult of feelings of which he had not deemed himself capable. The generosity of his spirit led him to sympathize with the more helpless party; and he would willingly have rushed on the stage, and exposed his own life to peril, if he could thus have aided the doomed and wretched Lybians.

Slowly they were driven to the back of the platform, fiercely contending every foot of ground, and leaving some of their


executioners dead and dying among the greater numbers of their own vanquished comrades. Then came a slaughter that made Alypius' heart beat, and his blood boil; and that caused Medora to cover her pale face with her hands, and shrink down to hide her gushing tears, and check her suffocating sobs.

Amid the loud cheers of the assembled multitude, this scene of butchery ended. Not one Lybian remained to claim the mercy of the Prefect; and the victors were hailed as benefactors to the state, and received the applause due to heroes.

The excitement which had absorbed all the faculties of Alypius soon died away. One glance at Medora had recalled him to his better feelings; and he now earnestly hoped that the spectacle had concluded, and that he might escape from the scene of cruelty into the pure free air of heaven.



CHAPTER III.

UT it was not so. Again the herald stood forth, and proclaimed the crowning act of the fearful drama. The Prefect had resolved to testify his zeal for the honour of the Emperor, and his desire to preserve the tranquillity of the city, and to promote the enjoyment of his people, by making a public sacrifice of certain Christians who had been seized on suspicion of conspiracy against the government, and had refused to abjure the errors of their faith and practice.

This announcement was received with a burst of applause; and among the lower orders the joy seemed universal. But as Alypius gazed wildly around the Circus, to see if an egress would be possible, he thought he detected a very different expression on the features of some individuals among the aristocracy. There were looks of fear, and pain, and shame, as if pity, or some deeper feeling, were not unknown in that great assembly.

"What are you about, Alypius?" whispered his friend. "You look utterly scared. I saw that you felt like a man—and a brave one as you are—during that cowardly massacre of the naked Lybians. But now your face is as white as that of the Egyptian girl who sits there trembling like a child. Command yourself, my dear fellow, and try to look as pleased and as grateful to our noble Prefect as all good citizens and

devout worshippers of the gods ought to be. See, the fanatical fools are already on the stage, and the tigers know them for their prey ! ”

Alypius had seen the little band of martyrs led on the stage before his friend had perceived them ; and his eyes and thoughts were riveted on their forms with such intensity that he beheld nothing else, and was unconscious that Julius continued to address him.

The deep interest which he felt in these helpless victims seemed to chain him to his seat ; and he even forgot his intention of leaving the Circus, until the movement and noise which succeeded the herald's announcement had passed away, and all were still and hushed in expectation. Then he saw it was too late to get away unobserved ; and he feared to draw on himself the raillery of Julius, and perhaps the rougher observations of the excited multitude.

So he sat still, and looked at the little band of Christians ; and he thought of his mother's friend, Monica, and rejoiced that she was not among the doomed party. Then he looked at Medora, and he saw her pleading face lifted up towards her father, and her pale and quivering lips moving as if in earnest entreaty. But those looks, which Alypius thought might have melted a heart of stone, did not move Sophis—no, not even when his wife seemed to join her supplications to those of her daughter. With a stern look of authority, and a few words of decided import, he seemed to settle the question ; and Alypius thought he could perceive Medora heave a convulsive sigh, as she turned away her glistening eyes from the stage.

How shall we tell what followed ? How shall we describe

the cruel and appalling scene that was enacted for the amusement of the luxurious Alexandrians? We must again leave the dreadful and harrowing details to the imaginations of our readers, and briefly allude to the noble victims and their holy courage.

The heroic band consisted of five persons. One, an aged man, was supported by his son, a young soldier of noble and undaunted bearing. Near them, but shrinking from the public gaze, were two sisters, who clung to one another as if for support and sympathy, and who trembled with mingled shame and dread ; but all the while Alypius could see that their fortitude and pious resolution were as firm and unshaken as that of the soldier, whose life had accustomed him to face death with calmness. The other victim was a boy, a fair and gentle boy, whose whole appearance bespoke the care and nurturing of a loving mother. Where was that mother now, when her son, the darling of her heart, stood on that dreadful stage, and awaited agony and death ? Happily she was in her quiet grave. She had been a widow and a Christian for several years ; and she had taught her only child to love and to trust One who loved him even more than she could do, and who would never forsake him, even when a mother's power and a mother's love might fail.

Young Icilius had received the Christian teaching of his devoted mother into a guileless and tractable heart ; and when they were denounced and cast into prison together, as disciples of the Crucified, it was he who had cheered that faithful but broken-hearted mother, all whose fears were for her child. And when his mother sank and died in that gloomy captivity, the last sound that met her ears, ere they awoke to the songs of

the blessed above, was the clear, sweet voice of Icilius, saying to her—

“Fear not, mother; your boy will not disgrace you. They may kill me; but they will only send my spirit to Jesus and to you.”

And now this babe in Christ stood steadfast on the platform, and looked up to heaven with such faith and hope in his glorious young eyes, that he seemed to be expecting “a chariot of fire, and horses of fire,” to come and wrap him from the sight of the cruel heathen multitude, and bear him unharmed to the land of joy and rest.

Did no pity move the breasts of that multitude? Were there no strong hands and valiant hearts ready to rescue the helpless Christians, and even to brave the same death that now awaited them, in the effort to rescue those whose only crime was having loved the Divine Lover of their souls, and being ready to die rather than deny Him who died for them? O God! and can it be that the hearts of thy creatures can be thus “harder than the nether millstone?” Can human beings, on whom thy mercy is daily and hourly poured down, be thus without one spark of mercy towards their fellow-men? Yes—thy word tells us that “the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.” So it has ever been—and so will it ever be until the Sun of Righteousness returns again to dispel the thick darkness of heathenism, and the murky clouds of unbelief, from this our polluted world.

None moved a hand, none raised a voice, for the followers of the despised Nazarene; and if any felt compassion, and perhaps sympathy for them, the fear of man kept them still and silent.

There were in that theatre many, especially among the females, who would not that day have been present if they had known that the usual performances and combats were to have such a closing scene. But even the ladies of Alexandria were afraid to manifest their repugnance to the cruelty and persecution which were frequently practised towards the Christians for the purpose of pleasing the superstitious and bigoted populace. So they all sat still, and heard the Prefect give the order for the opening of the iron-grated doors that divided the wild beasts from the stage. The chains rattled, the bolts grated in their sockets, and the doors were drawn up by men placed in a gallery above them.

There was a pause—a breathless pause—and then one shrill scream resounded through the Circus. Did it come from that group of victims? No; they uttered no sound; they made no movement; they stood like fixed and lifeless statues to receive the deadly gripe of the famished beasts. It came—that deadly gripe—and the souls of the martyrs rose, a holy and glorified group, to heaven. That piercing shriek rang through the ears of Alypius, and awoke him from that horrible kind of trance into which he had fallen. He looked at Medora; and he saw that her eyes were wild and staring, and every feature convulsed with agony.

“It is murder!” she screamed, in a loud, unnatural voice. “It is cruel murder of the helpless and the innocent. Let me go!” And she rose and flung her graceful arms aloft, and struggled violently with her father and brother, who strove to hold her.

Alypius was greatly excited. The fearful scene which was

still going on upon the stage had almost maddened him. Hardly knowing what he did, he sprang from his seat, and forced a way round until he reached the spot immediately behind Medora, and found her mother and brother endeavouring to bear her now senseless form through the surrounding crowd. All animation had now left her features, and all power had forsaken her limbs. She could neither move nor stand; but her eyes were open, and her white lips moved incessantly, as she murmured :—

“Oh, it is murder, and I have seen it! And those, the brave, the lovely, and the young, are being torn to pieces for the sake of their God! Could I thus endure for the sake of the great Isis? Could not the Christians’ God save them from this death? Are the wild beasts tearing that sweet child? Save him, O save him! you who are men!”

“Take her away; take her quickly!” said Sophis, in a low and almost angry voice. “She will draw the attention of the whole theatre upon herself and us. She wished to be a priestess of the gods of Egypt; she might have had to witness worse scenes than this.”

Sophis glanced intelligently at his son as he said these words, and was answered by a meaning smile.

“I shall remain here,” continued Sophis. “I must be seen in the theatre when the Prefect addresses the people, and gives prizes to the bravest and most skilful of the gladiators. I would not have him miss me then. I had intended to present this foolish girl to him after the entertainment; but her weakness has prevented it. You must try, Marcella, to bring her by-and-bye to the feast in the great square.”

Meanwhile Medora was becoming unconscious, and had ceased to speak. In vain Orestes besought the bystanders to make room for him to bear her away in his arms. The crush seemed to become greater, and the crowd denser. Just then Alypius saw a group of his fellow-students standing near, and eagerly waiting to press forward to the front of the seats. He entreated their assistance in clearing a passage; and their strong arms soon effected this object. He then respectfully addressed the mother of the now fainting girl, and requested to be permitted to give his aid in removing her from the theatre. Gratefully his offer was accepted; and he and Orestes carried her along the passages which led to the outer air; while Marcella, who was herself much distressed and agitated, followed closely, with her eyes riveted on her daughter's pallid face.


As soon as they arrived at the great entrance, and the fresh air blew on Medora's face, she opened her eyes, which immediately met those of Alypius. A rich colour overspread her cheeks at finding herself supported by a stranger, and she attempted to stand alone, but was obliged to lean on her brother, while she gently bowed her thanks to Alypius, and turned to seek her mother.

Marcella was close at hand; and she requested the stranger to summon the litter, which was ready to convey her and her daughter to their home. In this litter the ladies were placed; and then—repeating their thanks to Alypius, to which Marcella added a courteous invitation to their residence in the city—they were borne away, followed by Orestes; and the young Tagastean was left alone.

Much he mused on all that he had seen of the lovely and of the revolting, and of all that he had felt of pleasure and of pain, during the brief hours that he had been in the Circus. Many were his resolutions never again to enter a place where such barbarous scenes were to be witnessed. Deep were his reflections on the conduct of the Christians; and strong his desire to know more of the principles which actuated them, and gave them such courage and firmness. New, also, and painful were the feelings which filled his breast when he compared the heroic victims with those who had persecuted them to the death, and remembered how even the highest philosophy inculcated mercy and forbearance, and reprobated all needless cruelty as unworthy of the true dignity of man. But Alypius did not know anything of the natural corruption of the human heart—he did not know that, when left to itself, it is as a den of noisome beasts, only waiting until aroused by passion to break forth into the most frightful and cruel excesses.

Alypius believed that reason and philosophy were powerful enough to guide and govern a rational being, and keep him in the paths of morality and virtue. He *believed* this, though he had never yet found it true, either in his own experience, or that of any of his friends and acquaintance. He had yet to learn the only way by which the heart of man can be cleansed, or his life ennobled; he had yet to be taught, by repeated failures, that all his strength was but perfect weakness; and that only in the strength of ANOTHER could he hope to rise above his natural corruptions, and live the life for which he had been created.

CHAPTER IV.

OR some days Alypius wandered about like a troubled ghost. His studies were utterly neglected ; his "vain philosophy " gave him no comfort, and failed to divert his mind from the thoughts and feelings which had taken such strong possession of him. Even the society of his friend Julius had lost its zest ; for Julius rallied him about his admiration of Medora, and also expressed some little astonishment, and even contempt, for the pity which he had manifested towards the Nazarenes.

One of Alypius' favourite rambles was to the Point of Lochias, the promontory that bounded the great port to the east. From this point, and the rocks which proceeded from it a considerable distance into the sea, a fine view was obtained of the whole harbour, fringed, as it were, with towers and palaces and temples ; and dotted with innumerable vessels of varied size and picturesque forms, bearing the wealth and the luxury of many distant lands into this great emporium of trade. Across the entrance of the harbour, and at about the distance of a mile, rose the noted Pharos built by Sesostris of Cnidus, in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, 283 years before the Christian era. This splendid lighthouse was erected on a small rocky island from which it took his name ; and was connected with the main land by an artificial dyke of great length, at each end of which

was a passage for ships from the great port to the port of Eunostus, lying to the west of the city. Over these channels were two fine drawbridges, which completed the Heptastadium, as the whole connecting embankment was called, and formed a very favourite promenade for the gay citizens of Alexandria.

The less frequented Lochias was Alypius' chief resort. Thither he had often walked with his friend; and on the rocks which jutted into the sea, and were washed by its waves on either side, he had sat for hours, discoursing with him on the doctrines of their leading teachers, and the so-called religion of the philosophers. Now he repaired to this spot alone, and he mused on very different subjects. He thought of the ancient religion of the Egyptians, which he had been taught to despise as barbarous and obsolete, but of which he had been told the lovely Medora was a votary, and her brother an officiating priest. He knew little of the tenets of the Egyptians; but he believed them to be marked by ignorance and superstition, and not worthy to be compared to the enlightened opinions of the Greeks and Romans. Of these opinions his knowledge was very extensive; but the influence which they exercised over his feelings or his conduct was very slight. Indeed, he regarded religious belief as a matter which chiefly concerned the lower orders, and was useful as a restraint upon those who were incapable of being guided by those principles of honour and morality that were inculcated in the schools, and were considered quite sufficient for the educated members of society.

From these principles, and their often unsatisfactory results, the thoughts of Alypius turned to the Christians. He knew, as we have said, something of their doctrines from Monica and her

friends. He knew that the main principle of their lives was an entire and self-denying devotion to the Master whom they served, and a constant effort to promote his glory by their lives, or, if need be, by their deaths. He knew that purity and holiness, to a degree undreamed of either by the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the Romans, was inculcated by their teachers, and practised—or at least aimed at—by all who professed to be followers of the Nazarene, whose holy example they sought to emulate. All this he had known from childhood, but the subject had never greatly interested him. He had followed the opinions and the ways of his teachers and his young companions ; and especially had he been led by Monica's son, Augustine, whose lively talents and captivating appearance and manners had rendered him a very dangerous friend and associate for Alypius, in the days of their intimacy at Tagaste.

Since Alypius had resided at Alexandria, he had heard a great deal of the doctrines of the Christians, who dwelt in great numbers in that city and neighbourhood. Though Christianity was now the religion of the Emperor, yet the condition of those who professed it in the provinces depended, to a great degree, upon the character of the Prefect for the time being, and that of the inferior magistrates ; and also upon the influence which was brought to bear on these men in authority by the feeling and spirit entertained towards the Christians by the heathen populace. Many of the Roman governors, who were themselves supremely indifferent to the religious opinions of their subjects were induced to commit acts of cruelty and persecution for the sake of securing their own popularity. This had been the motive of Fabius in the instance which we have just recorded ;

and this had been the occasion of putting once more to the proof the oft-tried faith of the Christians, and displaying once more their indomitable fortitude, to the scorn and derision of some, but to the admiration and sympathy of others, who, though heathens themselves, could yet understand and appreciate the devotion and the noble self-sacrifice of the martyrs.

Alypius was one of these. His best feelings had been aroused by the heart-sickening spectacle in the Circus. The victims had appeared to him to be heroes, worthy of the brightest days of Roman virtue. The criminals had seemed to him far superior to the judges and executioners. The disciples of the lowly Jesus had worn in his eyes an aspect of dignity such as no seat of government, no robes of state, could ever equal in glory. He had seen what faith—confiding faith—could work, not only in the strong young soldier, but also in the aged man, the gentle maiden, and the young and untried boy. What could be the powerful principle that had enabled all these to meet death—and such a death—with courage, and without one effort to avert their dreadful fate by denying their Lord and Master? Such thoughts were salutary, and they were not without fruit; but Alypius had much to experience, and much to feel, ere he could truly comprehend the value of the Christians' motives, and the Divine beauty of the Christians' conduct.

Long he sat on the rocks of Lochias, and watched the lengthening shadows of the vessels, and the reflection of their sails in the blue water. By-and-bye the light on the summit of the lofty towers of Pharos was kindled, and shone as a guiding beacon far over the sea. Other lights sprang out of the growing darkness all round the circling bay, like a fringe of fire-

flies trembling in the distance. Nearer to Lochias, in the eastern suburb of the city, stood the Cæsareum—the royal palace or temple of the Cæsars—with its two obelisks on each side of the entrance, rising tall and slender above all the surrounding buildings, and pointing to the unfathomable depth of deep blue sky that hung cloudless above them. There also rose the great Museum, with all its adornment of statues and frescoes, now scarcely visible in the waning light; and there was the magnificent Exchange; and hard by stood the beautiful temple of Neptune, which contained treasures of bronze and marble.

All these, and many more stately and beautiful buildings, met the eyes of Alypius as he gazed thoughtfully around the bay; and the calm loveliness of the scene sank into his heart, and stilled the anxious workings of his troubled spirit. At length he rose to return to his lodgings in the city. He walked slowly along the way that led by the obelisks, on which the rising moon was now shedding a weird and silvery light. How tall and gaunt they looked against the clear night sky, and how many thoughts they awoke in his mind of the old days of Egypt's glory and power, when they had adorned some grand temple, perhaps far up the ancient and mysterious Nile!

So much did his own thoughts engross him, that Alypius was all unconscious of the few passengers whom he met by the way; and he was only aroused from his sense of solitude by coming in contact with the crouching figure of a woman near the base of one of the obelisks. She did not move or speak; and for a moment Alypius feared she was dead. But soon she heaved a deep sigh, or rather a groan, and he addressed her:—

"Why are you here alone, and lying on the ground?" he asked, gently; and he laid his hand on the woman's arm, as if to raise her up.

She looked in his face with a sudden start; and, as the moon's soft light fell on her face, Alypius saw that it was pale and sunken, and that her eyes were shining with a wild and unnatural brightness.

"The ground—the ground!" she repeated, slowly. "Would that I were beneath it, and at rest!"

"Are you in distress, then—in want?" asked Alypius.

"I want nothing on earth—nothing that you can give."

"But I may help you, if you will tell me the cause of your grief. I can pity you, if I can do nothing else."

"How should you feel pity for me? You have never known what it is to be twice bereft of all you love."

"Have you no home—no friends—poor woman?" asked Alypius, in a voice of such sympathy, that it seemed to touch the woman's withered heart and pent-up feelings. Tears glistened in her eyes, and she said, in a wandering manner,—

"I have a home, but there are no kind voices now to welcome me there. And there is one little grave beneath the acacias and oleanders. I made it, and decked it for him, and he sleeps there—all that remained of his blessed form when the wild beasts left it."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Alypius. "Was one of those Christians who perished in the Circus a relative or a friend of yours?"

The woman looked up suspiciously, and the cold look came back to her eyes.

"Are you going to denounce me?" she said. "I did not say that I was a Christian."

"And if you had said so, you need fear no harm from me. I would not hurt a hair of any Christian's head. I saw those martyrs die; and I shall never forget it."

"You saw them die! You saw my brave and beautiful boy torn to pieces by the tigers; and, more cruel than the wild beasts, you did not try to save him!"

She rose from the ground as she uttered these words in a deep, hissing whisper; and then she stood confronting Alypius, and looking as if he were answerable for the death of him she mourned.

"I would have saved him—I would have saved them all," he replied, so earnestly that the woman's countenance again relaxed. "I would have thrown myself between that noble boy and the savage beasts; but I could not reach him. The sight almost maddened me."

"Are you a Christian, then?"

"No; but I can feel for the injured and oppressed of every religion."

"Can you? Then may the blessing of Christ rest upon you; and may he give you that faith which may indeed bring upon you suffering and death in this world, but must lead you to everlasting glory and happiness hereafter."

As the woman spoke these words she looked earnestly at Alypius, and then raised her eyes to heaven as if in supplication. Her countenance was now calm, and she seemed to be raised for the moment above the sense of maddening grief which had so lately overpowered her. What was it in her face

which made Alypius start, and gaze upon her so fixedly? He could not tell; and whatever it was, it passed away so quickly, that he could not even recall the sensation to which it had given rise in his breast. The wild glitter returned to that afflicted woman's eyes, and the hurried whispering tone to her voice; and she laid her cold, thin hand on the arm of Alypius, and drew him forward as she said,—

"I can trust you. Come with me, and I will show you where he is sleeping; and there is no one to weep over his grave but me!"

She hurried on in silence, and Alypius obeyed her guiding hand; for he felt a deep interest in her, and earnestly desired to know more of her sad story, and to endeavour to relieve her distress.

Silently they passed on through several streets until they reached a small, low house in a retired situation, among gardens, and wide-spreading tamarisks and acacias. The woman opened the door, and led Alypius through a dark passage out into a small enclosure behind the house, on which the clear moonlight was shining, and casting the shadows of the quivering foliage above.

"Here—here he lies," she said, in a voice half choked with emotion, as she drew Alypius to a little mound under the spreading acacia in the garden. "See—he is quiet, and at rest. The savage beasts, and the more savage heathen, cannot touch him here." Then her wandering look and manner came back again, and she went on in a whisper, while she held up her finger to silence Alypius:—

"Ah! do not speak; a strange voice might disturb him.

Stay—I will sing to him ; he knew my voice so well, and he loved to hear me sing. I could always make him sleep quietly—so quietly.”

And she began to sing in a tone so sweet and touching, and yet so wild, that Alypius was deeply moved. Tears were in his eyes, and the woman saw them.

“You weep for me,” she said, more gently, “and I seldom weep. My tears are all dried up. When my husband—he who taught me to believe in Jesus Christ—was taken from me, I thought my heart would break ; and my family had all cast me off because he had become a Christian, and had taught me to forsake the worship of stocks and stones. But I had comfort in the certainty that he was gone to the Master whom he served ; and I promised him on his death-bed that I would be true to that blessed Master, and would bring up our child to be his faithful servant.”

“And does that child lie here ?” exclaimed Alypius, interrupting her. “And was it he who so nobly sealed his faith, and died for the honour of his Master’s name in the Circus ?”

“Oh, no. That was not my own son—though I could almost wish it had been he ; for then I should know that he was in heaven, where my husband dwells. But my boy—my Cleon—I know not where he is. After I was left alone and desolate, I left Alexandria, and went into Upper Egypt with a friend. We dwelt on the border of the desert, and in great seclusion, for a long time. Then came a band of wandering Arabs, and they robbed our dwelling of all that it contained—yes, even of my only treasure. My friend tried to save my child, and the savages murdered her. I had gone to the village in the neigh-

bourhood; and when I returned all was over, and the Arabs gone. A young Egyptian who had seen it all, and had hidden himself in our garden, told me the fearful story. I hardly remember what happened after that. But I know that I came back to Alexandria, and that I found a friend in Portia, the mother of this martyred boy. He was a son to me, and she as a dear sister; but they were accused as traitors and enemies to the State, and cast into prison. There Portia died: and you know the end of Icilius."

"But how did you procure the body of the martyred boy?"

"I had a friend—a humble friend—to whom my husband once rendered a great service, and he had not forgotten it. He was one of those whose dreadful office it was to attend at the Circus, and to have the charge of the beasts. He knew my love for Icilius, and that my poor heart was breaking. I said that I would give myself up and die with the sweet boy; but he prevented my thus throwing away my life in my despair; and he promised to try and save him. He did try—he used great and noble efforts, but in vain. I waited in agony all that fearful morning, hoping to see my boy restored to me. But, oh, what words can tell my anguish when he brought me his mangled body! All that I had felt when I lost my own son came back to me—my senses seemed to forsake me, and strange sights and sounds to haunt my brain. I buried Icilius here; my friend helped me to lay him in the grave." And again she sang in the same strangely sweet voice, which thrilled to the heart of Alypius; and again that look returned which had so greatly startled him before.

It was gone in a moment; and he waited silently until she

ceased to sing. Then he took her by the hand, and led her into the house, and tried to recall her thoughts to herself, and her future life.

She told him that her name was Claudia, and that her family were among the rich and great of Alexandria ; but she firmly refused to tell their names, far less to permit Alypius to go to them on her behalf, as he proposed to do. She said that she did not require pecuniary assistance at present, as Portia had bequeathed to her all her humble possessions ; but she thanked Alypius warmly and gratefully for his kind sympathy, and assured him that it had calmed and comforted her, and that she would gladly see him at her lonely dwelling whenever he would visit her there.

So he left her in solitude ; but his mind was filled with plans for her future comfort and safety, which he lost no time in endeavouring to carry out.



CHAPTER V.

THE feeling of interest and compassion which had been awakened in the breast of Alypius did not die away. He was resolved to rescue the lonely Claudia from her state of misery, which he feared would end in insanity. Her mind had evidently been violently shaken; and if allowed to prey upon itself in solitude, might probably become hopelessly deranged. He was long at a loss as to the course he should pursue to save her from such a fate. He had no one whom he could consult on the subject, for he knew that Julius would ridicule his benevolent feelings, and consider his schemes for the welfare of a mere stranger as enthusiastic folly. He also feared to take any step which might compromise the poor woman, and betray her as a companion of those who had been so cruelly put to death.

In this dilemma, he resolved to apply to his mother, who, though not herself a Christian, had too much respect for the religion of her friend Monica, not to feel an interest in the trials and sufferings of Claudia.

He therefore dispatched a letter to Calanthe, in which he gave her a full account of all that had occurred at the Circus, and of his meeting with Claudia. He told her the story of the unhappy woman's life and sufferings, and he dwelt upon her present lonely and even perilous position; and he concluded by

entreating his mother to receive her into her own peaceful home at Tagaste, and give her, at least for a time, an asylum, and a refuge from danger and persecution. As a sort of bribe to Calanthe, he promised that if she consented to his proposition, he would himself conduct his poor friend to Tagaste, and remain there for some time before resuming his studies at Alexandria.

The mind of Alypius was troubled. His thoughts and opinions were greatly disturbed; and the eager enjoyment which he had hitherto found in the pursuit of learning and the acquirement of knowledge of every kind, had vanished away. He felt that it would be a relief to him to leave the schools of philosophy for a time, and to repose in the society of his mother and his many friends at Tagaste.

He therefore waited anxiously for the reply of Calanthe; and meanwhile his thoughts often reverted to Medora; and he longed, yet feared, to look on her sweet face again. Once he ventured—remembering her mother's words at parting at the Circus door—to call at her home, accompanied by Julius. He was politely welcomed by Marcella, who received him in an apartment fitted up much more in the Egyptian style than in that usually adopted by the Greek or Roman inhabitants of Alexandria; and had to Alypius a strange, and somewhat mysterious appearance. But he had no time to examine the objects that surrounded him; for a heavy embroidered curtain, which covered a doorway at the end of the apartment, was withdrawn, showing for a moment the black smiling face and ivory teeth of a little Nubian slave; and then Medora entered. A look of mingled sadness and pleasure animated her features



ALTIUS RECEIVED AT THE HOUSE OF MEDORA.—PAGE 46.

as she recognised Alypius; for she thought of his kindness and attention at the Circus; and she also remembered the painful cause of her indisposition, which had called for his assistance. But soon her agitation was conquered; and she joined her mother in entertaining their visitors, with a grace and intelligence that added to the admiration with which Alypius already regarded her.

The visit was a short one, for the young men feared to intrude; but, to the great satisfaction of one of them, Marcella begged them to repeat it; and added that a festive assembly was to take place in a few days, at her house, to celebrate the departure of her son, Orestes, to his priestly duties at Phylæ, when Medora was to accompany her brother, and make some stay in the sacred isle. To this entertainment she invited Alypius and his friend, telling them that they must not be surprised if they saw many customs and observances practised on that occasion which they had never seen in the houses of their Greek or Roman acquaintances.

"In honour of my son," she continued, "we shall follow the practices of the Egyptian ancestors of my husband as far as it is in our power to do so. Indeed the habits of our daily life are much more Egyptian than Roman."

"All that I see around me is pure and classical, from whichever nation it may be derived," replied Alypius, glancing at the costly furniture and rich draperies which adorned the room, and then resting his eyes on the graceful form of Medora, who seemed quite unconscious of the admiration which she excited.

The visitors departed; and the succeeding days seemed long to Alypius, until that of the festival to which he was invited.

At length the wished-for day arrived, and Alypius again presented himself at the mansion of Sophis. He found many guests already assembled in the vestibule, and in the handsome and tastefully-decorated saloon, where the embroidered hangings, and polished marble floors, and richly inlaid seats and tables would have engaged much of his attention, had it not all been absorbed by one object. Medora stood beside her mother at the upper end of the apartment. Her countenance was beaming with smiles, as she assisted in giving a courteous welcome to the guests. Her dress was strictly Egyptian; and yet so tastefully was it arranged, and so gracefully was it worn, that it had none of the stiffness and formality which Alypius would have expected; and which were discernible in the costumes of the other members of her family—especially of Orestes, her priestly brother.

Medora was attired in a long and flowing robe of snow-white linen, of a texture peculiar to the looms of Egypt, and so delicately fine as to be partly transparent. The dress and its long hanging sleeves were bordered with elaborate embroidery in gold and rich-coloured threads. A girdle of gold and precious stones encircled her slender waist, confining her inner vest, and gleaming through the loose folds of an upper robe; and long tassels of the same costly materials depended from it in front. Her beautiful brown hair, which hardly looked in keeping with her Egyptian costume, was carefully plaited and fastened at the back of her head with long gold pins, which were richly set with sparkling gems, while above her forehead a golden crescent shone as an emblem of Isis. Her neck and arms were also adorned with chains of gold; and her small feet,

as they peeped from beneath the folds of her long robe, showed a pair of elegantly-fitting sandals of polished dark-green leather, fastened with golden clasps.

Such was the dress of the ancient Egyptian maidens; and such was still, on state occasions, the costume in which Sophis wished his daughter to appear. His wife also, although a Greek by birth—and from whom Medora had derived her fair complexion and sunny hair—was attired in the most correct Egyptian manner, which became her stately person, and gave her an air of dignity and repose as she moved about among her guests. To Alypius she accorded a gracious smile, and permitted him to converse with her and her daughter for a short time. But soon Medora was led away to another part of the saloon, and Alypius stood watching her graceful form and animated countenance in utter forgetfulness of everything else.

“Are you moonstruck, my friend?” said Julius, laughing, as he suddenly approached and disturbed the contemplations of Alypius. “It is a pity that you are not of pure Egyptian birth, and given to the worship of cats, and apes, and serpents, as well as of the silvery moon. Then perhaps you might be preferred to that close-curved image of a man, with his long, antique-looking eyes, and his stiffly-folded dress, in which he seems to have walked out of the royal tombs at Thebes. Look how he glides up to the fair Medora, and what a fine contrast his sallow complexion and raven hair form to her fair skin and rich brown locks. Will she greet him with one of her sunny smiles?”

“Who is he?” asked Alypius, speaking very eagerly, but trying vainly to look perfectly unconcerned.

"He is a friend of the priest Orestes," replied Julius, smiling at his companion's evident agitation. "His name is Muthis; he possesses wide and fertile fields on the borders of the Nile; and it is reported that he is a suitor for the hand of his countrywoman, Medora."

"His countrywoman!" repeated Alypius, contemptuously. "She may indeed have been born in Egypt, and her father may have Egyptian blood in his veins, but she is a type of the purest Grecian race. She is fit to have been the model of one of the statues of Phidias or Praxiteles."

"Nevertheless, she is an Egyptian in religion," replied Julius; "and you see she openly wears an emblem of the goddess whom she worships. No doubt some of our divinities are earthly enough; but we who are enlightened, know what to believe and what to reject. We leave the grosser superstitions to the ignorant lower orders, and only reverence abstract spiritual ideas under material forms. The Egyptian theology is far more degraded, and some of their deities are absolutely hideous, as you well know."


"But Medora could not worship those deities. If she pays reverence to Osiris and Isis, and to the moon as a type of the goddess, her religion is at least as pure and elevated as that which Rome inculcates. Nothing mean or degrading could find an entrance into the soul that dwells in that lovely shrine."

"I never knew you so enthusiastic before, Alypius. You had better take care of your heart; for I much doubt if any Roman would ever be allowed to aspire to become the son-in-law of Sophis."

“Who ever dreamt of such a thing?” replied Alypius, hastily. But at the same time the colour mounted to his brow, and a pang shot through his heart, and he thought how blessed it would be if he and Medora were sharers of one faith—and that a faith which could fill the soul and satisfy the craving spirit, and also ennoble and purify the life. At that moment he recalled the expression of holy trust and confidence which he had seen on the countenances of the Christian martyrs; especially of the two maidens, who in age and sex, and feminine gentleness, resembled Medora; and he thought how such an expression would ennoble and beautify her lovely features. He felt that he could be willing to brave the Christian’s fate, and die the martyr’s death, if only he and Medora could learn to believe in the Christian’s God, and live or die together.



CHAPTER VI.

ULIUS was struck with the extreme gravity and earnestness of his friend's countenance ; and he began to fear that his admiration of the Egyptian girl was becoming too strong for his peace of mind. He was, therefore, glad when his profound meditations were interrupted by the entrance of several servants, each carrying a richly-wrought silver bowl, and a long-necked ewer of the same material, from which he poured perfumed water ; and then kneeling before each of the guests in turn, proffered the basin, that they might refresh themselves by bathing their hands, which they dried on an embroidered linen cloth that hung over the shoulder of the attendant. Other domestics followed with vases of costly unguents, with which they anointed the heads of the visitors ; and a third band succeeded, who placed chaplets of fresh flowers on each head, and presented to each guest a nosegay of the delicious lotus blossoms. The whole apartment was filled with sweet odours—so sweet that the unaccustomed senses of Alypius would have been overpowered, had not the large open casements admitted a plentiful supply of fresh and balmy air from the garden and terraces beneath.

All these ceremonies occupied a considerable time ; but as they were new to Alypius and his companion, they were amused with observing them ; and they also followed the

example of the other visitors, and wandered through the suite of rooms, admiring the curious and beautiful works of art with which they were abundantly decorated.

Before they had completed their survey, the steward of the household made his appearance, and announced that the banquet was prepared; and the company were led by Sophis, and his wife, Marcella, to the grand hall. There they found two long tables extending nearly the whole length of the apartment, and loaded with every luxury which could be procured at home or abroad; but all prepared and served in the Egyptian fashion. The hall was very splendid; the walls and floor were of marble of various colours, as were a row of pillars which partially divided the apartment towards the lower end, and behind which a band of musicians were stationed.

The old Egyptian custom of separating the male and female guests was observed on this occasion, and they were conducted by their hosts to the right and to the left, and placed in due order at the two tables. While they took their seats on the luxurious couches which were ranged along the tables, the musicians played lively and festive airs on their instruments, which consisted of lyres, harps, a species of guitar, and double-pipes; a square-shaped tambourine being used to beat the time.

The banquet commenced by a wine-cup being carried round the tables, and presented to every guest; and of this even the ladies all partook before entering on the more substantial part of the repast. This was not so unlike the dinners of the present day as might be supposed; and consisted of joints of beef, veal, and pork; but no mutton was admitted, as the flesh

of the sheep was not eaten by the Egyptians. Poultry was also abundant, particularly large well-fattened geese; and the numerous vegetables for which the land of Egypt has ever been celebrated, were served up in a variety of ways, mingled sometimes with the blood of oxen. Then followed sweetmeats and confectionery, prepared with elaborate art; and graceful vases and baskets of fruit completed the feast. Among these were luxuriant clusters of grapes, olives, citrons, figs, bananas, dates, and pomegranates; some the produce of the rich soil of Egypt, and some brought from distant lands. Nor were the beverages that accompanied the repast less varied or less rich. Many kinds of wine were manufactured in the fertile valley of the Nile, and were highly prized. Beer also was well known to the Egyptians, and great quantities both of that and of the juice of the grape were drunk by both sexes; and we have reason to believe, from ancient paintings, that the ladies not unfrequently were guilty of excesses which we, in these days of greater refinement, can hardly credit.

No such degrading scenes occurred in the house of Sophis. The stately Marcella took care that everything was conducted with the most perfect propriety, and that her Egyptian visitors should in no way shock the feelings of the Greek and Roman ladies who were her chosen friends, and with whom she greatly preferred to associate. Nor was the banquet unduly prolonged; so that when the attendants had again carried round the perfumed bowls and the embroidered napkins, and every lady had again washed her hands, the whole party rose from their seats with perfect steadiness, and stood erect to witness the concluding ceremony.

This ceremony appeared to Alypius a very strange, and also a very impressive one. While the guests stood silently round the tables two servants entered the hall, bearing on a kind of bier a small wooden image of the god Osiris, in the form of a mummy, and about three feet in length. This image was carried slowly round the tables, and presented to the gaze of each guest separately, as a warning that in the midst of life and enjoyment death was ever near, and that it was needful to remember the fleeting nature of all earthly joys and pleasures, and to prepare for the coming time, when the bodies now so capable of activity and enjoyment would be as cold and unconscious as the sculptured mummy before their eyes.

This custom may have originated in wise and good intentions, and the effects may have been beneficial. But, as is the case with most forms, the spirit had long been forgotten, and it had become, with most of those who observed it, a mere ceremonial.

Alypius was in an unusually serious frame of mind ; and he was astonished at the unconcern with which most of the guests looked on this emblem of death. Only on the countenances of Medora and her brother did he perceive any expression of solemnity or deep thought. Even their Egyptian visitors seemed perfectly indifferent to the image of their deity, in the garb of death ; and as soon as it was carried from the hall, they all resumed their gay and lively conversation, and hurried out to the terraces and gardens, to enjoy those sports which had been the recreation of the ancestors of Sophis many centuries before.

Of these, a species of draughts, and another game called

mora, were the principal favourites ; and in these the players hazarded considerable sums, and lost and won with great avidity and excitement. The rest of the guests roamed through the gardens, and listened to the musicians, who were stationed at suitable spots ; or watched the graceful evolutions of the professional dancers, who were hired for the occasion. Among the Egyptians it was considered highly indecorous for any of the higher class, whether male or female, to dance in public, or even to sing or play on any musical instrument in a mixed company. Those who possessed any such talents were therefore compelled to confine the exercise of them to the family circle ; and hired musicians and dancers were consequently always provided at every entertainment.

Alypius had observed both a harp and a guitar in one of the smaller rooms, and he felt assured that music must be one of the gifts of the fair Medora. It was almost a passion with him ; and he sighed as he thought that he might never hear her voice raised in song, or see her graceful form bending over the harp. “ Oh that she were a Roman maid ! ” he said to himself, “ then I might aspire to her hand. My father’s noble blood would place him on a level with the proud Sophis, even though that pure blood is the chief inheritance that he has left me.”

Alypius had resolved not to give way to the fascination of the fair Egyptian, and rather to avoid than seek her society ; and yet, almost unconsciously, he followed her through the gardens ; and when he saw Muthis approach her, as she stood with some of her young friends to watch the athletic exercises which were being performed by some of her father’s domestics,

he also drew near, and keenly watched her manner towards the Egyptian. It was as cold and distant as he could desire, and he rejoiced that it was so; and yet what was it to him? He approached and spoke to her; and then a smile lighted up her features, and his heart bounded with joy—and yet, what was that to him either? But it was something to Muthis, for he looked vexed and irritated at the interruption of a stranger, and drew himself up proudly.

Alypius cared not for his anger. He was happy in being permitted to converse with Medora; he forgot all his good and prudent resolutions, and remained with her as long as the wrestling and other gymnastic sports continued. When they were concluded, she turned rather abruptly from Muthis, who was endeavouring to engage her attention, and led the way to a large and handsome pavilion which had been erected in the garden, and was now brilliantly illuminated with small lamps of every colour, arranged so as to form an arabesque border round the roof and the curtains. At each entrance to the gay pavilion were fountains of perfumed water; and these were also lighted up, so that the spray, as it fell around, looked like a shower of sparkling gems.

It was, indeed, a fairy scene; and, to Alypius, Medora seemed the very queen of the fairies, so lightly and gracefully did she move over the marble floor, and so sweetly did her joyous laugh ring through the air as she talked gaily to her young companions, and replied to the observations which he occasionally ventured to make.

The pavilion was furnished with several tables, which were laden with fruit and other suitable refreshments; and richly

inlaid and sculptured seats of antique forms invited the guests to repose. The sun was setting when they entered the building, and darkness followed with great rapidity. But with equal rapidity the whole of the extensive gardens was lighted up as if by magic; and when the company left the pavilion, they found that the darkness of approaching night had been turned into a soft and lovely light as clear as that of the moon, but warmer and richer by the countless coloured lamps that hung from every tree and bush, and formed elaborate patterns on the cool soft grass.

Again the athletic exercises were renewed, and to the wrestling succeeded what closely resembled the well-known game of single-stick; and then a trial of muscular strength, by lifting great weights from the ground.


How true it is that "there is nothing new under the sun." All these sports were practised in the land of Egypt many centuries before the time of which we are speaking; and exact representations of them and of many other modern customs and so-called inventions are to be seen in the ancient temples and tombs of that strange and mysterious land. We moderns vainly imagine that our superior civilization and intelligence have led us to make discoveries, and devise cunning devices, that were unthought of in the days of old. But the wider and the deeper our researches into antiquity are carried, the more do we find the truth of the saying that "there is nothing new under the sun." Additional proofs are daily brought to light that many of our so-called modern inventions were invented long ago, and that many of our discoveries in science were well known in the days when Jacob and his family went down into Egypt.

It was Medora's pleasant task to give prizes to the successful competitors in the games ; and as they were all members of her father's numerous household, they were all personally known to her, and they received with their appointed reward some words of kindness and courtesy, which seemed to be quite as highly appreciated. Alypius almost wished that he were one of the fortunate number, and might dwell near Medora, even in a servile capacity, and have the privilege of waiting upon her and ministering to her comfort, and of receiving in return such kindly smiles and gentle words. Other men, as young and as enthusiastic as Alypius, have entertained as foolish thoughts, and many have acted far more foolishly than he did : for he left the dwelling of Medora that evening with a firm resolve of returning thither no more ; and of practising "the better part of valour," by seeking safety in flight to Tagaste, as soon as he received his mother's reply with regard to the unhappy Claudia.

That reply soon reached him ; and it was all that he could expect or desire. Calanthe expressed the sincerest sympathy in the sorrows of the desolate Christian woman, and freely offered her an asylum so long as it might suit her to remain under her roof ; and she begged her son to lose no time in bringing her to Tagaste, reminding him at the same time that she should expect a full reward for her compliance with his request, in a lengthened visit from her beloved son.



CHAPTER VII.

Y the side of a rippling stream, whose borders were adorned with oleanders in rich blossom, and shaded by the waving palm and spreading tamarisk, sat two women, whose look and manners bespoke them to be of gentle birth, though the quietness and simplicity of their dress, and the absence of any attendants, might have led to a different supposition.

These women were Monica and Calanthe, the mothers of Augustine and Alypius. Both were widows; and their lonely condition, and sympathy in each other's trials and sorrows, had drawn them together, and caused a strong friendship to exist between them. The difference in their religious opinions still existed—although lessened in degree, and softened in spirit—for Calanthe was still a professed worshipper of the gods of Rome. At the same time, her constant and familiar intercourse with Monica had sufficed to banish her prejudices against the disciples of Jesus, and to inspire her with a sincere respect for the principles of those who were Christians, not only in name, but in deed and in truth.

For some time Monica had endeavoured, by argument, to bring her friend to renounce her false deities, and embrace the true religion of the gospel. Her naturally powerful and intelligent mind, which had been highly cultivated from her youth,



THE TWO WIDOWS OF TAGASTE.—PAGE 60.

gave her great advantage over Calanthe, who found herself unable to reply to her reasoning, or deny her assertions. But Calanthe had hitherto remained unconvinced, and her heart unchanged. She could not yet feel the truth of all that Monica so unhesitatingly believed, and therefore she could not profess any agreement with her. But there was a power which Monica exercised over her that was stronger than that of argument. The example of her Christian faith, guiding her in all her daily life, supporting her under trials, consoling her under sorrows, and inspiring her with a calm confidence amid repeated disappointments, was not without its influence on Calanthe; and sometimes she almost wished that she could share a belief that produced such blessed and admirable results.

Monica had ceased to endeavour to draw her friend into controversial discussions; but she lost no opportunity of letting her see the power of Christian faith, and she earnestly prayed that the same faith which dwelt so firmly and abidingly in her own breast, might yet be bestowed on Calanthe.

The mother of Augustine was eminently a woman of prayer. This had been her comfort, when all her exhortations and all her tears and entreaties had repeatedly failed to convince her thoughtless and misguided son of his errors, or induce him to reform his wild and abandoned course of life. She had a holy confidence, which nothing could shake, that eventually her prayers would be answered, and that her son—that only child, in whom all her earthly affections were now centred—would be snatched “as a brand from the burning,” and made a monument of God’s loving-kindness and sparing mercy. Well it was for her that she had been gifted with such a faith!—and well it

was for Augustine that he had such a mother—one whose patience never failed, and whose love was inextinguishable, even by his grievous faults.

Often did these two Tagastean widows sit together, either in their modest dwellings or by the river side, and converse about their respective sons, and their respective hopes and fears with regard to them ; while their hands busily plied the distaff, or worked at some article of clothing or of domestic use.

“ And you expect him so soon, Calanthe ? ” said Monica, on the occasion to which we refer. “ It will be a joyful hour for you when he arrives—I trust untainted with the vices of the great city. Alypius was always far more sober and discreet in his conduct than my unhappy son.”

“ He certainly has been steadier than Augustine of late years,” replied Calanthe. “ But he has caused me much anxiety. I have, as you know, seen very little of him for the last two years ; and I can only hope that he has devoted himself to study, and that the precepts of our best philosophers and the teachings of his preceptors may have preserved him in a course of virtue and morality.”

“ A poor foundation to rest on, Calanthe. The doctrines of the philosophers can never raise their scholars above the level of their own standard ; and we know what were the lives, and what the deaths, of many of them. We know also what were the reputed lives of those whom they call their gods. Can the believers in such deities be expected to soar far above the objects of their worship ? We worship a perfect Being, and aim at following a perfect example. Oh that I could see my son aspiring to such a noble purpose in life ! ”

“You expect too much of so young a man as Augustine, my friend. Doubtless as he grows older he will grow wiser and steadier, and more desirous of living a virtuous and honourable life. The pleasures in which he now delights will then cease to have any charms for him, and he will give his mind to better things.”

“Dear Calanthe, I can find no comfort in such reflections as those. The virtue that rises from a want of inclination to indulge in vice, is of little value. Our religion teaches us to conquer temptation, and practise self-denial, in those evil things to which our fallen nature is most prone. Our Master lived not to please himself, but to serve his heavenly Father, and to do good to the souls and bodies of his sinful creatures. It is our duty and our privilege to follow his holy example, relying on a strength that is not our own, but which is promised to all who pray for it in faith. For that strength I daily supplicate my Saviour and my God, on behalf of myself and my erring son; and I ask it for you, Calanthe, also.”

“Should I be happier if I possessed it, Monica? Would the cares and anxieties of life really be lessened if I believed, as you do, that every small event was under the control of one Divine Being, and that he takes account of our every action, and word, and even thought? It seems to me a dreadful belief.”

“It is a blessed thought,” replied Monica, solemnly. “It is a blessed and an elevating thought that the eye of an ever-present God is watching over his children for good, and the hand of an almighty God is ever extended for their defence and preservation in all trials, and dangers, and difficulties. It is a very blessed thing to know that he has declared that ‘all things

work together for good to them that love him ;' and I do love him, Calanthe, I do love him who died for me, with all sincerity, though not with all the devotion I ought to feel for him."

As she said these words, Monica raised her eyes to heaven, and seemed wrapped in holy and happy contemplation ; while her friend looked at her with affectionate reverence, and almost with a feeling of envy.

"Do you then believe, Monica, that all the trouble and anxiety which your son has caused you, has been appointed by your God, and is for your good ? That seems strange to me."

"I know that it has never been the will of my holy Lord that Augustine should fall into sin—that is the effect of his own evil inclinations, which he has never striven to subdue in the only way by which they could be conquered. But I believe assuredly that my merciful Father has overruled all for my good, because I know that I trust in him. I believe that he has suffered me to be sorely tried, and to endure bitter anxieties, and repeated disappointments, in order to prove and strengthen my faith, and lead me to greater earnestness and perseverance in prayer. I believe also that not one tear has been shed in vain—not one prayer has been unheard or unanswered, though as yet I am left in darkness and in sorrow. But the day will come—I know it will come—when the Lord will change and soften the heart of my beloved son, and make him a vessel of mercy, to his own honour and glory."

"Then you expect that Augustine will turn from the ancient creed of his nation, and abandon the philosophical studies in which he has already so greatly distinguished himself, and give

up all prospect of advancement in his profession, and be content to become a follower of the crucified Nazarene ? ”

“ I do look forward to the happy and glorious day when my son will be willing to sacrifice every earthly object which stands between him and his Redeemer, and will, with the great apostle Paul, ‘ count it but dung that he may win Christ, and be found in him, and may attain to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord, by whom the world will then be crucified unto him, and he unto the world.’ ”

“ And do all Christians feel as you do, Monica ? ”

“ It is the privilege of every one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, to enjoy even a livelier faith than I have attained to, Calanthe. But we all fall very short of the graces and blessings to which we might attain. Some dispositions are also more confiding than others, and can more readily appropriate the promises of God ; and, as it were, *take him at his word*. I fancy that such is my character ; at all events, I never doubt what God has said, and he has declared, ‘ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ How then can I fear, and how can I cease to pray ? ”

“ You are a happy woman, Monica, in spite of all your troubles. I never feel that comfortable assurance that events will be brought about because I desire them.”

“ Trust in the Master whom I serve, and you may enjoy the same blessed confidence, Calanthe. I have been greatly supported under many trials ; and I have experienced the truth of the declaration, ‘ As thy day is, so shall thy strength be.’ At times, when I have been exceedingly cast down, and tempted

to feel almost impatient, some special sign has been granted to me to cheer my fainting spirit, and strengthen my feeble faith. You know that I have several times had a hope that my son was turning from his evil ways, and would take our Holy Scriptures as his guide. He has studied them, and has confessed that much wisdom is to be found in their sacred pages ; but his studies have, as yet, only partially enlightened his mind, without touching his heart. Soon after his father's death—when unhappily Augustine arrived too late to hear Patricius confess himself a disciple of Christ—he expressed a strong desire to understand and share the comfort which I derived from the word of God. He read the word carefully, ‘seeking,’ as he said, ‘for *wisdom*.’ But his proud spirit could not receive heavenly wisdom—his unchanged heart could not comprehend the simple truths of the gospel, or bow itself in penitence before the cross of Christ. He remained an unbeliever ; and, to add to my sorrow, he soon afterwards fell into the company of some men of great talent, who were members of the sect called Manichæans, and was led by their arguments to embrace their opinions. I felt that he was now further than ever from the right way, and that the little truth which I had ever been able to instil into his mind would soon be utterly eradicated. What resource had I but to pray and weep ? And my heavenly Father heard my prayers, and sent to me a blessed vision. I believe I was sleeping for sorrow ; and in my dream methought I stood upon a bridge that spanned a rapid and troubled stream. A sense of my own security was in my breast ; but at the same time I was conscious of deep anxiety with respect to Augustine. While I stood there, a young man

of resplendent form approached me, and spoke to me words of hope and comfort. He bade me dry my tears, and believe that '*where I then was*—even in that place of safety—*there should my son be also.*' Greatly was I cheered by this assurance of the angelic messenger; and, as he seemed to depart, I awoke, and found Augustine standing by my side. Instantly I told him of my dream, and entreated him to strive for its fulfilment. But he did not lay it to heart as I did; and he even ventured to suggest that it might signify my embracing his opinions, rather than his becoming a convert to mine. You, who know my feelings, though, alas! you do not share them, may imagine how I repelled such an idea, and assured my son of my conviction that he would one day become a true servant of the living God, and of his Son Jesus Christ; and that I should live to see it. This conviction has never left me; and I know that God will bring it to pass in his own good time."

"You are kept long waiting for its accomplishment," said Calanthe, in a doubting tone.

"Yes; but that may be to rouse me to greater efforts in my son's behalf, and also to render his conversion a more striking instance of the grace and mercy of our God. I hope I put my sole trust in him; but yet I use all the means in my power which can possibly influence my son. Even before I followed him to Carthage, I endeavoured to interest the bishop who then presided over the little band of Christians in this district, to make some efforts to reclaim Augustine from his sinful life and his heretical opinions; but long I pleaded with him in vain. His time was greatly occupied; and perhaps he thought also that I exaggerated my causes of grief and anxiety, for he only

bade me *wait and pray*. This I had done for many sad and weary years, and I would not be so repulsed. My tears flowed fast as I continued to implore his aid, and dwelt on the perilous condition into which my dear and only son was sunk. At length the bishop was moved at the sincerity of my grief, and in a tone of deep sympathy he said, 'Go thy way, Monica, and God bless thee. It is impossible that the child of so many prayers and tears should perish !' O Calanthe ! what joy and peace I felt as the venerable man pronounced those words. They seemed to come to me direct from Heaven ; and whenever my heart sinks with disappointment, I repeat them again and again to cheer my spirit. I had need of them and every other source of consolation when Augustine left me and went away to Rome. It was the first time that he had ever deceived ; me and I fully believed him when he said that he was only going on board the vessel with some friends, and would return to me. I accompanied him to the port, and repaired to a small Christian oratory near the shore, and spent the hours in prayer and meditation while I waited for his reappearance. Night wore wearily away, and morning dawned, and still he did not come. At length I went to the port ; and was told that the vessel had sailed for Italy, and that my son had not returned to the shore. That was a crushing blow indeed ; but even then the Lord sustained me, and enabled me to return to my home at Tagaste, still trusting in his overruling providence to bring good out of all this seeming evil. You know that at Rome Augustine was very dangerously ill, and I have reason to hope that his sickness was in a measure blessed to him. He became disgusted with the want of truth and honesty which he met with among


his associates in the great capital of the world ; and he has lately removed to Milan. I only wait a fitting opportunity to follow him there, for he proposes to make it his permanent residence."

"I shall be lonely indeed, Monica, when you leave Tagaste," said her friend ; "and who will then teach me, as you have done, the beauty of a holy life, or lead me to wish that I could believe in a religion which yields such good and happy fruits ? Monica, I shall then have no Christian friend ; and, unbeliever as I am, I have learned the value of such friendship as yours."

"The Lord will provide you with what is needful, dear Calanthe ; and I shall see you, as well as Augustine, among the glorious company of his faithful servants."



CHAPTER VIII.

“ HAVE been very selfish, Calanthe,” continued Monica, after a pause; “I have dwelt so long on my own interests and my own feelings, that I have forgotten your son’s letter, and the further information which you say it contains with respect to the poor Christian woman towards whom his conduct has been so kind and benevolent. I believe, dear Calanthe, that both he and you will reap a rich reward for your generous kindness to the desolate Claudia; for our Divine Master promised that he would recompense every such act towards one of his disciples as if it had been done to himself. It is true that neither you nor Alypius are yet believers in him; but I am sure you will both become his servants, and the entrance of this Christian woman into your family will doubtless bring a blessing with it.”

“I fear, Monica, that my chief motive for complying with my son’s request was the hope of seeing him after his long absence from home. I do also feel much for the unhappy Claudia’s lonely condition, and for all the trials that she has had to endure. I know what it is to be left alone in the world; and I would do what is in my power to alleviate the sorrows of a fellow-sufferer. You have taught me to love the followers of Jesus, by showing me the virtues that you say this religion teaches. If all who are now called Christians were as pure, as

kind, and as self-forgetting as you are, Monica, I think the religion would spread more rapidly than it does. Men would love it for its fruits, and would prefer it to the worship of deities whose lives are known to have been anything but good and holy."

"Calanthe," said Monica, looking very earnestly in her friend's face, "if you feel all this, why do you still profess to worship those so-called deities; who—if they ever existed—were only, as you confess, frail and imperfect beings; and who have only been exalted to the dignity of gods by the ignorance and superstition of their fellow-creatures? Why cannot you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; in him who created those very human beings whom you now call gods; in him who was from eternity One with the great Almighty Source of all things, and who yet humbled himself to become a man, and to die for the sake of sinners—in him who rose from the grave and returned to his Father, and who now dwells in that glorious heaven where all his true disciples will hereafter dwell with him in perfect purity and perfect joy, that will know neither change nor end?"

Monica paused; and such an expression of holy love and holy zeal overspread her countenance, that she appeared to Calanthe almost as an angel. She knew not what to reply to her earnest appeal, the evident sincerity of which impressed her deeply; and yet she could not say that she believed in the Crucified One as her Lord and her God. Calanthe had so long been accustomed to believe in a plurality of gods that it did not either surprise or shock her to find that others worshipped deities in whom she had never put her trust, and whose aid and protection she had

never invoked. Jesus of Nazareth might be the God of a certain nation, or a certain sect, or even of certain individuals, who chose to pay their vows to him, and enrol themselves among his followers in preference to any other deities ; but she did not, therefore, believe that there could be no other object of worship, and that the God of the Christians was the only true God of the universe.

Conversion in Calanthe's heart must be a gradual work, founded on a firm conviction of the superiority of the Christian religion over all others, not only in its doctrines, but in the practice of its disciples. The life of Monica had done much to teach her the purity and heavenly-mindedness to which a sincere follower of Christ might attain ; but the inconsistency and worldliness of many other professors had also done much to shake her belief in the sanctifying effects of Christianity, and to lead her to believe that all the virtues and graces which she saw and admired in Monica were rather the result of her natural character than the fruits of her holy faith.

At the period of which we are speaking the profession of Christianity was widely spread. It had been embraced not only by the Emperor and the court, but by many of high rank, and occupying eminent and influential stations throughout the provinces. The name of *Christian* no longer brought persecution and shame on those who adopted it ; nor did it stand in the way of worldly honour and worldly advancement. It did not, therefore, require the same degree of faith and courage as in earlier times, to enable any one to take up the standard of the Captain of our salvation, and declare himself one of his soldiers and servants. Consequently there were many who

were called Christians because they were born of Christian parents, or because circumstances had led them into Christian society. Many marriages also took place between Christians and pagans, which tended greatly to impair the purity of the rising church, and also led in some cases, as in that of the faithful Monica and the idolatrous Patricius, to the conversion of the unbeliever, though probably much more frequently to the falling away of the nominal Christian. Many heresies had also begun to spring up in the church. Arians, Manichæans, Donatists, Pelagians, and others, were already disturbing the peace and unity of the professing church, and, by the lives of numbers of their members, bringing discredit on the holy name by which they were called. No wonder, then, that Calanthe was led to question the divine pre-eminence of a religion which appeared to produce such uncertain fruits.

All these doubts and difficulties Calanthe had often expressed to her friend; and as often had Monica endeavoured to show her that the sins and inconsistencies of nominal believers ought not to be any hindrance to her believing in the holiness of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, and in the divinity of Him who taught them. Calanthe acknowledged this, but she did not yet believe. The grace of God could alone remove the film from her spiritual vision, and enable her to look on Him whom her sins had pierced as her only God and Saviour. To that grace Monica inwardly committed her, firmly believing that it would ere long be extended to her beloved friend, as surely as she believed it would be exerted for the salvation of her still more beloved son.

Again the conversation reverted to the letters which Calanthe

had received from Alypius, and the happy prospect of his speedy arrival at Tagaste with the interesting Christian widow. The sun was now sinking in the west and gilding the summits of the distant range of Atlas mountains which bounded the view in that direction. Calanthe and Monica finished their conversation, gathered together the implements of their industry, and rose to return to their homes near Tagaste. As they approached the dwelling of Calanthe, which was situated in the suburb of the small town, they observed a rather rude vehicle, something between a cart and a chariot, drawing near from the opposite direction, along the road that led from Carthage.

No sooner did the driver perceive them than he urged the horse to greater speed, and in a few moments Calanthe found herself in the arms of her son. So great was her joy at again beholding him that for a time she forgot his fellow-traveller, and did not observe the sad and wistful eyes of Claudia, which were filled with tears as she gazed at the happy mother, and felt that no such meeting with her own lost treasure, or with her adopted son, could ever be hoped for by her on earth.

Monica divined the feelings of the bereaved mother, and with gentle sympathy she approached her, and greeted her, and drew her into conversation. Soon Calanthe recovered herself; and then she courteously welcomed the stranger, and bade her to consider that she had come to a home, and that friends would henceforth endeavour to cheer and comfort her.

A sad smile lighted up the wan features of Claudia as the looks and words of kindness fell on her ears and her heart; and as Alypius watched her, the same strange look came over her

countenance which he had already observed more than once, and which had so greatly startled and puzzled him.

Day by day Claudia became more calm, and her manner more settled and composed. The sadly wild and wandering expression which had so painfully marked her features when Alypius first met her, now seldom returned; and she began to occupy herself in various ways, and to assist Calanthe in many of her domestic avocations. Her gentle manner, and her grateful sense of the kindness which was shown to her, soon won the affection of Calanthe, and made her take a real pleasure in her society. As her health and spirits gradually returned, she also shewed such a cultivated mind, and so much energy of character, that Calanthe involuntarily looked up to her; while the exalted tone of Christian piety which pervaded all her conversation, and gave a colour to all her conduct, inspired her new friend with feelings very similar to those which she entertained for Monica.


The mother of Augustine saw with pleasure and with gratitude the growing friendship between Calanthe and the young Christian widow, on whom the former soon began to look as a daughter. Monica hoped much good would arise to her friend from such constant and familiar intercourse with so devoted a servant of Christ; and she looked on the entrance of Claudia into the family of Calanthe as an answer to her prayers, and a providential arrangement to supply her own loss, when she should be obliged to leave her, and to follow her prodigal son to Milan.

For this change of residence, and the long journey which it involved, Monica now began to prepare. There was much that

was trying to her in the prospect of leaving her home at Tagaste—the home where she had passed all her married life—which, though often one of trial and sorrow, had yet been blessed by the ultimate success of her prayers and her efforts for her husband, and his sincere reception of the gospel of Jesus. Now she was ready to abandon that home, and to go bravely after her lost son, “resolutely,” as he tells us in his well-known “Confessions,” “following me, through piety, over land and sea, in all dangers confiding in Thee. For, in perils of the sea, she comforted even the very mariners, assuring them of a safe arrival, because Thou hadst in a dream assured her thereof.”



CHAPTER IX.

ONICA arrived safely at Milan, and joined her wild and wandering, but always affectionate son. Great was her joy when he informed her that he had given up all connection with the sect of the Manichæans; for although she knew that he was not yet a Christian, the fact of his having abjured the pernicious doctrines of the Manichæans brought comfort to her heart, and added strength to her confidence that he would at length become all that she so ardently desired to see him.

Augustine had already become acquainted with Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan; and he even took delight in listening to his preaching; the eloquence and earnestness of which interested his intelligent mind, but had not yet touched his heart.

With this good man Monica soon formed an intimacy, which ripened into a sincere mutual friendship. So great was the bishop's admiration of her piety and virtue, that Augustine tells us, he often, in conversation with him, "burst forth with her praises, congratulating him that he had such a mother; not knowing what a son she had in him, who doubted of all things, and imagined the way of life could not be found out."

It was rather with sorrow than with surprise, that Monica found that the change in her son's opinions had not effected any material change in his mode of life. She well knew that

the heart must be renewed ere the life could become holy. Nevertheless, she hoped to lead him to forsake some of his evil associates and his evil habits, by drawing him into the society of those whose lives were respectable and virtuous; and, with this view, she prevailed on him to think seriously of entering on a married life. She soon brought about an acquaintance between him and a young maiden, who she felt assured would secure his affections; and her hopes were so far realized, that Augustine willingly contracted an engagement with the fair and amiable girl, who was captivated by the charm of his manner, and the grace and dignity of his form and features.

Junia knew not of all the falls, and all the struggles, and all the oft-repeated relapses into gross sin, of which Augustine had been the subject. She could not have realized a state of mind so tempest-tossed, so doubting, and often so despairing, as that which Augustine experienced, even while he appeared at times cheerful and happy, and gave every promise of securing to her a home of joy and peace and contentment, as his wife. The son of her revered friend, Monica, could not, she deemed, be otherwise than a good man, and a good husband.

For certain family reasons, it was decided that the marriage should not take place for two years. And, during that time, Monica hoped that her son would not only adopt a steady mode of life, but would also, by his brilliant talents, obtain the means of a comfortable subsistence for himself and his wife. But alas for all her hopes! A very short time had elapsed after his betrothal to Junia, when it was found that he had broken all his good resolutions, and fallen back into all his vicious ways. It seemed as if all his convictions, and even all his

efforts at reform, were utterly powerless, and that he were indeed a castaway!

The friends of Junia would no longer consent to her marriage with so abandoned and hopeless a character; and the poor girl could not conceal from herself the misery which must be her portion if she were united to one in whom no confidence could be placed. The engagement was therefore broken off; and in a short time Junia was removed from Milan.

This was a dark period in the life of Augustine. Sad and weary was his spirit; and, as he himself expresses it, he strove to still the eager craving of his soul, by greedily enjoying present things, and saying, "To-morrow I shall find the way."

Dark also was the lonely life of Monica. Nothing but the light of faith had she to cheer her in her sorrow and disappointment. She naturally shrank from society, and dwelt almost alone; for Augustine was fully engaged with his own pursuits and his own pleasures; and prayers and tears were again his devoted mother's portion, and her only solace.

It was therefore with something like joy that she one day beheld Alypius enter her humble dwelling, and produce a packet of letters from her friend Calanthe, and also from Claudia. These letters told her of the sincere conversion of Calanthe to Christianity, and her resolution to embrace the religion of Christ openly and publicly, as soon as Monica returned to Tagaste. This was indeed joyful news to Monica, and it not only gave her comfort for her friend, but it filled her with fresh hope for Augustine. The Lord had heard her prayers for Calanthe—would he not also listen to those which she so continually offered up for her beloved and only son!

From Claudia she heard of her improved health, and of the rest and peace which she enjoyed in the dwelling of Calanthe, whose society was now doubly dear to her since she had become her sister in faith, as she had already been in affection. She also spoke much in praise of Alypius, whose devotion to his mother had greatly impressed her, and of whose disposition to know and to embrace the truth she felt very hopeful. "Could I," she said, "hope that I have been in any way instrumental in inspiring or strengthening this desire in the breast of Calanthe's son, I should feel that God had enabled me to make some return to her for all the kindness which I have received from her. May He grant that Alypius may be the means of withdrawing your son Augustine from his evil companions, and leading him at last to desire the knowledge of the only way of peace!"

"So be it," said Monica, solemnly, as she closed the letters, and turned to converse with Alypius. From him she learned many interesting particulars concerning his mother's conversion; and she also perceived that his own desire for spiritual knowledge had greatly increased, and that his respect for the principles of Christianity was much strengthened. Earnestly she exhorted him to pursue his search diligently and untiringly; and warmly she entreated him to make the Holy Scriptures his only guide, and to endeavour to draw Augustine from the pursuit of philosophy to that of the word of God, in which alone true wisdom and true peace could be found.

Alypius informed Monica that he had, for the present, abandoned all intention to return to Alexandria. He said that he knew he should find no satisfying knowledge in the schools of

the philosophers, which he had there frequented; "and," he added, "there are recollections connected with that place which render it one of pain and danger to me. Time must obliterate those visions of the past, before I can re-enter Alexandria."

"What then do you design to do?" inquired Monica.

"To remain in Milan as long as it is your residence, and that of Augustine; and to seek the aid of his great talents in the endeavour to unravel the many difficulties which I have found in the Scriptures, which profess to be the unerring word of God, and to teach the way of salvation. I know that Augustine has a mind superior to superstition; he will only believe that which is reasonable, and will not be misled by the opinions of fanatics. We will together seek the truth."

"And may the Lord guide you in the search, and give to you both the help of his Spirit!" replied Monica. "But, Alypius, you must lay aside all pride of reason—you must bow down your intellect before the teaching of the Scriptures, and consent to receive God's truth as a little child: otherwise you may search the Scriptures in vain. It is this pride of intellect which has been, I firmly believe, a barrier in the way of Augustine's embracing the doctrines of the gospel, and becoming a servant of the Lord Jesus."

"O that I could find the truth!" exclaimed Alypius. "I have had many letters of late from my friend Augustine, and I know that his soul is torn with distracting doubts, and his spirit is weary with seeking some principles that can give rest and peace. Like him, I have sought for happiness in worldly pursuits and sensual gratifications—like him, I have studied the works of the greatest philosophers, and found in them

nothing satisfying—nothing to give peace in life, or hope in death. Now I am resolved that Augustine, who was once my teacher, shall learn of me what I have learned of Claudia—to study the Christian's Bible, and hope for the Christian's faith."

"May the God of the Christians be with you and bless you!" replied Monica, earnestly. "I said that the reception of the poor widow into your mother's house would bring a blessing with it; and so it has proved. Did you leave Tagaste with the intention of coming here to join my son? You have been long on the way, for I see by Calanthe's letters that you set sail from Carthage many weeks ago."

Alypius coloured deeply at this question, and paused for a moment, as if doubtful how to reply to it. Then the naturally ingenuous expression returned to his countenance, and he said :

"You will deem me weak and sinful, Monica; but I must tell you all the truth with as much frankness as if I were speaking to my own mother. I did leave my home with the full purpose of coming direct to Milan, and commencing that search on the success of which I feel that my happiness depends. But when I got to Rome, where I had some business to transact, I found so much to engage my attention and distract my mind, that I lingered on for days, and weeks, and even months, before I thought on the object of my journey, and had strength of mind to pursue it."

"What was it, Alypius, that so greatly attracted you at Rome? Not, I hope, the society of the students and professors in that centre of learning and civilization. Even my son was so disgusted at the want of truth and honour in his

young associates at Rome, that it led him to dislike and despise them, and to desire some opening for leaving the city, and taking up his abode elsewhere. Therefore, when a requisition was sent from Milan to Symmachus, the Prefect, desiring him to send a professor of rhetoric, Augustine used the influence of his friends to obtain for him the appointment which he now holds. He is not yet a Christian ; for that I hope, and strive, and pray, and will continue to do so, until the Lord has answered my prayers. You will help towards their fulfilment, Alypius ; I know you will be an instrument for good to my son."

"I would that I were worthy to be an instrument for good to any of my fellow-creatures," replied Alypius, very humbly. "But, Monica, when I tell you what it was that detained me at Rome—what it was that excited me even to madness, you will hate as well as despise me. You know—for I was obliged to confess it to you and my mother in connection with Claudia's story—you know that I was persuaded, against my judgment, to attend the celebration of the gladiatorial games at Alexandria; and you know how my feelings were aroused and shocked. I thought that nothing could ever obliterate those feelings, or induce me again to enter a theatre where bloodshed was to be made a sport. For a time I resisted all the entreaties of my friends at Rome, and refused to be present at any scenes of blood and cruelty. At length a false shame overcame me, and I yielded to the arguments, or rather to the ridicule, of my companions, as I had before yielded to Julius at Alexandria. I went to the grand Colosseum, and my soul was filled with admiration at the splendour and extent of the building, and

the countless multitude of spectators who were ranged around. I had firmly resolved that as soon as the gladiators entered the spacious arena, I would close my eyes, and keep them firmly shut so long as the combats lasted. Thus I hoped to avoid the sarcasms of my associates, and yet to spare my own feelings."

"And how did you succeed?" inquired Monica, with much interest.

"As I ought to have expected when I attempted such a compromise between my worse and my better nature. For some time I kept my resolution, and I saw nothing of several of the conflicts between men and men, and between men and beasts. I only heard the struggles and the hard-drawn breath of the combatants, and the groans of the wounded gladiators, and the savage growls of the maddened beasts. My heart beat, and I strove to turn away my thoughts and imagination from what was going forward before me; but in vain. I saw it all in my fevered brain. At length, one long loud shout rang through the whole building: I felt it in every nerve, and involuntarily I unclosed my eyes to discover the cause of the unusual excitement. I beheld one of the gladiators desperately wounded, but defending himself with a skill and courage that were grand to look upon. The sight of blood seemed to inebriate me; I could not again close my eyes; they were riveted on the death-struggle in the arena. Madly I gazed. I shouted till my own voice startled me as it rang above all the clamour that filled the theatre.

"I left the place exhausted with excitement, but enamoured of the cruel sports which once I detested. Again and again I visited the Colosseum whenever the games were to be repeated.

And, not content with being myself a spectator and a lover of the cruel sports, I did all in my power to persuade others to do the same."

"And how were your eyes opened to perceive the sin and the inhumanity of those fearful spectacles, Alypius?" inquired Monica.

The colour rose on the young man's cheek and brow as he replied :

"It was the recollection of a gentle face that I saw first at the Circus at Alexandria. It rose up before my mind while I was in the Colosseum, pale and agonized, as I had seen it there; and I thought what the expression on those lovely features would have been if she had been where I then was, and could have seen me gazing with wild joy on a spectacle that had once filled my breast with horror and disgust, equal even to her own. I left the Colosseum without waiting for the combats to be concluded; and I have never entered a theatre since that day, nor will I ever do so again."

"Your mother would rejoice to know that you have made such a resolution, Alypius. Did you not also think of her, and of what she would have felt had she known of your frenzied enjoyment in such a scene of cruelty?"

"I did think of her after I had left the Colosseum and returned to my lodging. I did wonder how I, the son of such a mother, could have acquired such tastes, and have acted in so insane a manner. Monica, I wish that I were worthy of my mother, and Augustine worthy of you."

CHAPTER V.

THE night was dark and still. No sound broke the silence except the soft sighing of the waves upon the pebbly beach, and the measured footfalls of a small party, who, shrouded in long mantles, and carrying a lantern, left the streets of Alexandria and proceeded by a narrow alley, that led them through gardens and suburbs, until they reached the open plain beyond. Many ruins of ancient buildings were scattered over this plain: and towards one of these the party advanced, slowly and carefully following one of their number, who bore the lantern, and seemed to be their guide. He led the way among scattered stones, and tangled weeds and bushes, until he reached some low rocks, on the slope of which stood the broken remains of a small but massive temple.

Long grass and trailing creepers nearly covered the rocky foundation of this ancient building: but a close observer might have traced a narrow and winding path through the weeds and herbage, and a somewhat artificial arrangement of the pendent creepers on the spot to which that pathway led.

To this spot the guide led the three female forms that followed him. The place looked gloomy and forbidding; and one of the females drew back, as if in terror or in doubt. A few words, however, from one of her companions, seemed to reassure her; and the whole party entered the ruined temple,

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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THE GUIDE LEADING THE WAY TO THE MEETING OF CHRISTIANITY.—PAGE 86.

and descended a flight of rude steps that conducted them into a wide and spacious chamber in the centre of which a number of persons were assembled.

Several torches were fastened against the pillars, and cast a wild and flickering light around, while the smoke rose to the roof, and formed a thick cloud above. It was a gloomy place for a social meeting; and yet the countenances of the group that was gathered together in the cavern were expressive of peace, and joy, and gratitude.

The mantles in which the features of the three females had been almost concealed, were now withdrawn; and Marcella, taking Medora by the hand, addressed a venerable-looking man who had approached to greet her, and who looked at the lovely maiden with much surprise.

"This, Mandatus, is my daughter, Medora. I do not bring her here to join in our worship. For that, I grieve to say, she is yet unprepared. Still I bring her in hope—for, thanks be to God, some of her prejudices against our holy faith have been shaken; and she is willing to know more of our doctrines, and to see more of our practice. May it please the Lord to give her the same conviction which has entered into my own heart, and to make her a more faithful and courageous servant of the Redeemer than I can ever hope to be."

"The Lord bless you, my sister," replied Mandatus; "and may he grant your pious desire!"

"Amen," said Marcella fervently; and as she bent before the venerable Christian teacher, she could scarcely have been recognised as the stately wife of the proud Sophis. Her whole air and manner were changed and softened, and her counte-

nance expressed humility and self-distrust. She knew that she had for some time acted the part of Nicodemus, and had feared to confess her growing convictions of the truth of Christianity, and the utter fallacy of paganism. She knew that the fear of man, the fear of ridicule and shame, and perhaps of persecution, and, above all, the fear of her stern husband's anger, had long deterred her from prosecuting the inquiries which she desired to make as to the doctrines of the Nazarenes, and from attending at any assemblies of the despised sect, to hear the gospel preached by the appointed teachers.

Marcella's attention had first been drawn to the purity and beauty of the religion of Jesus by some Greek converts, to whom she was connected by family ties, as well as by those of sincere friendship and esteem.

These Christian friends had even induced her to be present at some of their meetings, and listen to the preaching and the discourse of the teacher and elders of the congregation. But neither her name nor her station was then made known, for Marcella dreaded lest her husband should be made acquainted with her conduct.

Her friends had since returned to their own native land, and had left Marcella in a very wavering and unhappy state of mind. Her faith in her own heathen deities was much shaken; her intelligence was aroused to perceive the folly of idolatry, and the impurity of pagan belief, and pagan practice; her good taste revolted against many of the legends of mythology, whether Greek, or Roman, or Egyptian; her heart was touched by the simple beauty and the intrinsic holiness of the character of Jesus—but she could not altogether

shake off old associations and old feelings ; and for a long time she shut up her new convictions in her own breast, and dared not to impart them either to her own heathen relatives and friends, or to Christian strangers.

Marcella was in this very unsatisfactory condition of doubt and perplexity at the period at which our story opened ; and when she was obliged, most unwillingly, not only to accompany her husband to the theatre, but also to join him in requiring Medora to be present at the gladiatorial combats, had she known that any of the followers of Jesus, with whom, even then, she so greatly sympathized, were to be martyred on that festive occasion, it is probable that she would have feigned illness, or endeavoured by some other subterfuge to avoid being a witness to so heartrending a scene. She paid the penalty of her want of resolution, and suffered even more keenly than her daughter did, through the whole cruel spectacle, which was so greatly in violation of all the principles of the religion of Jesus.

It was a happy circumstance for Marcella that Medora was less able to control and hide her feelings than she had taught herself to be ; for Sophis' attention was consequently occupied by his daughter, and he did not perceive his wife's agitation and distress. In the aged man who then met his fate, and went to join " the noble army of martyrs " in heaven, Marcella recognised a pious and influential member of the church of Alexandria—one whom she had met in the assemblies which she had already, though secretly, attended, and from whom she had received Christian counsel and Christian encouragement. Once she fancied that his eye fell on her with a look of recognition, and a sharp pang shot through her heart as she

thought how he, who was calmly meeting a fearful death in his Master's cause, must despise her for professing to believe in the truth of Christianity and yet acting so entirely contrary to its spirit.

Thankful, indeed, was Marcella when her husband desired her to remove Medora from the theatre ; and thankful, also, was she for the aid of Alypius, who had already attracted her attention by the evident sympathy which he felt for the Christian victims, and the indignation which their cruel fate so visibly excited in him. She hoped that, like herself, the young man was a secret believer in the crucified Nazarene ; and this led her to receive his assistance so readily, and to invite him so courteously to her house.

She afterwards discovered from his conversation, that his sympathy for the Christians arose merely from the natural humanity of his disposition, and that he held their belief almost in contempt. She, therefore, very carefully concealed from him her own feelings, and regretted that one so amiable and so intelligent should remain in ignorance of the only saving knowledge.

Her excited feelings made her desire more than ever to find some one who could understand her doubts and difficulties—her hopes and fears ; and when Medora spoke of the horror with which the scenes of the Circus had inspired her, and the admiration which she felt for the heroism of the Christian martyrs, she could not restrain that desire, and she told her daughter that she herself believed in the Christians' God, although she was very far from possessing the Christians' holy courage.

The astonishment of Medora at this avowal was very great, and her sorrow even greater; for she had always regarded Christianity as a weak, and even a mischievous superstition; and while she felt pity for the victims, she despised their faith.

Nothing that Marcella could urge upon her had any effect in lessening her prejudices; and when she left Alexandria with her brother Orestes, and went to the sacred Isle of Philæ, it was with a determination to devote herself more than ever to the ancient religion of Egypt, and especially to the worship of her favourite divinity, Isis.

The whole civilized world was at that time in a transition state; as also were the hearts and minds of multitudes of individuals in every nation and of every class. The knowledge of Christianity was already widely diffused, and in many places firmly established. At the same time, idolatry and heathenism and philosophy kept their ground, and frequently prevailed altogether over the new faith. Religion fluctuated in a very remarkable manner; and sometimes one faith was in the ascendant, sometimes another. In Egypt this was peculiarly the case; and the old religion of the Pharaohs still struggled against the Greek and Roman mythology, and still more obstinately against the rising Christian church. Osiris and Isis, and all their countless train of inferior deities, were indeed tottering on their thrones; but they still found a stronghold in the Isle of Philæ, and they still had many worshippers in all the towns of Egypt. It was not until several years after the period of which we are speaking that, in the words of Milner, "Egypt forsook the superstition in which for so many ages it had been involved; and the country which had nourished

idolatry more early and more passionately than others, was made the special scene of the triumphs of God and his Christ."

When Medora returned to Alexandria, with her belief in the gods of Egypt, and her love for their worship, strengthened by her residence in Philæ, and by the teaching of her priestly brother, Alypius was gone. From his friend Julius she heard that he had returned to Tagaste on a visit to his mother; and it was with pleasure she found that Julius expected him to return ere long to resume his studies in the Academy.

Medora wondered at herself for the interest with which she listened to this information, and also to the praises that Julius poured forth upon his absent friend. Possibly he perceived that the subject was not distasteful; for he generally contrived to introduce it whenever he met the fair daughter of Sophis. He also observed that the assiduous attentions of Muthis were more disagreeable to her than ever; and this led him to lose no opportunity of speaking of Alypius in that manner which he hoped would further his cause and gain favour with Medora. He did not know that his friend had left Alexandria with a full determination to conquer his incipient attachment, and not to return thither until he could regard with indifference the lovely votary of the crescent-crowned goddess.

Medora did not wish for the general society which once had given her pleasure; and she and her mother spent much time together in earnest conversation respecting their religious opinions and feelings. Marcella was a less acute reasoner than her daughter, for she had not enjoyed the same advantages of education that had been bestowed on Medora; and, therefore,

the latter frequently appeared to have the superiority in an argument. But truth, when sincerely brought forward, must prevail; and Medora often felt that the ground of her faith was untenable, and that a sense of dissatisfaction was creeping into her mind.

Long she resisted her mother's entreaties that she would accompany her to the Christian assemblies; which, during Medora's absence, she had attended more frequently, and among the members of which she had now acquired many sincere friends. But at length curiosity overcame her resolution, and she consented to be present at the next meeting to which Marcella felt they could go without any fear of detection. This plan was the more easily carried into execution from the fact that the true believers in our Divine Lord were again suffering persecution at the hands of the heretical and half pagan Prefect, leagued with heathens, Jews, and infidels; and the members of the true church was hence compelled to meet secretly and under cover of the darkness.



CHAPTER XI.

THE guide who had conducted Marcella and her companions to the catacomb, was Justin, a faithful attendant and friend of Mandatus—one who was devoted to his heavenly Master, and equally faithful towards his earthly master. The third female who accompanied Marcella and her daughter, was Pyrrha, who had been Medora's nurse, and was now her constant attendant. Pyrrha was, like her young mistress, a worshipper of the gods of Egypt; and she always accompanied Medora to the great temple of Serapis, which was situated in that portion of the city called Rhacotis, bordering on Port Eunotes. This magnificent building was one of the architectural glories of Alexandria; but it was a cause of great offence to the Christian community, who used whatever power or influence they possessed in the city to have the worship of the Egyptian god abolished. Hitherto all their efforts had proved ineffectual; and the great Serapis had his temple and his worshippers, not only in Alexandria, and the more ancient cities of Thebes and Memphis, but also in Rome itself; where, so late as the middle of the third century, the temple dedicated to him and to Isis was magnificently adorned by Alexander Severus.

At the shrine of Serapis in Alexandria, Medora had been a constant visitor when she was not residing with her brother at

Philæ; and many were the offerings which she had there made to "*the god of the swelling Nile*"—which was one of the names by which the Egyptians loved to call their favourite deity—and also to Isis, whose worship was associated with that of Serapis, or Osiris.

The gorgeous decorations of the temple, the splendour of the officiating priests, and the pomp and circumstance of heathen ceremonial, had always exercised great influence on the feelings and imagination of Medora. She could not realize the idea of approaching a deity—an immortal god—with merely spiritual worship, divested of costly offerings and magnificent outward show.

What were then her feelings when she entered the gloomy, secluded chamber, destitute of all ornament! No furniture had this simple place of worship except a few rude seats, one higher than the rest for the officiating minister. No offering had they brought but that of sincerely devoted hearts—the best offering that man can make, and that which God loves most to receive.

The number of the disciples now met together greatly surprised Medora, and Pyrrha also—who had followed her mistress as she would have followed her to the end of the earth, and who merely felt that wherever Medora saw fit to go, there it was also good for her to be by her side. They stood together, apart from the Christian congregation; for it was understood by the presbyter and his flock, that they were admitted merely as spectators, and could take no part in the service.

It was the evening of the Christian sabbath, and the service was opened with a psalm, in which all the congregation joined;

1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem. This involves gathering information about the situation and the people involved.

2. Once the problem is identified, the next step is to analyze it. This involves breaking the problem down into its components and understanding the underlying causes.

3. After analyzing the problem, the next step is to develop a plan. This involves determining the steps that need to be taken to solve the problem.

4. The final step in the process is to implement the plan. This involves putting the plan into action and monitoring the results.

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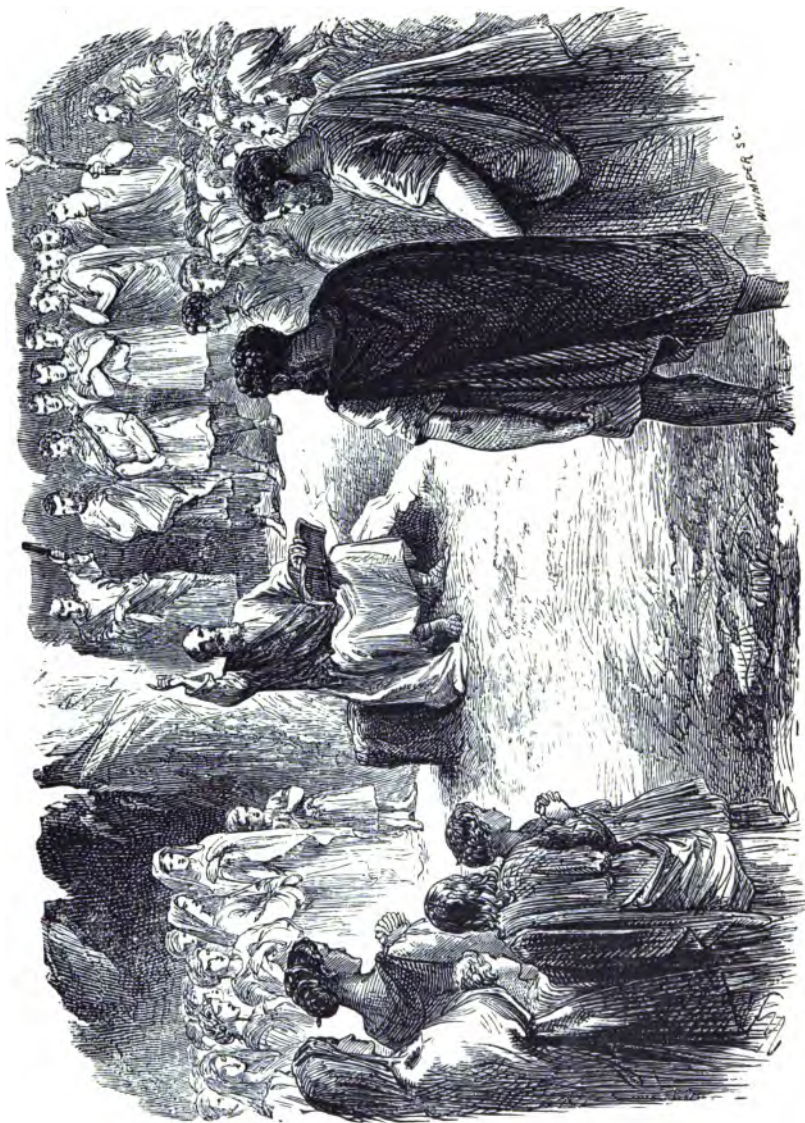
and the solemn sweetness of their voices, as they rose and were re-echoed by the distant caverns, inspired Medora with feelings of devotion, and increased her desire to know more of the faith which was expressed in such a touching manner.

The psalmody was followed by the reading of short portions of the Gospels and Epistles, the presbyter pausing at intervals to give the congregation time for silent prayer and meditation. During this part of the service all remained standing, which was considered the most suitable and reverent posture in which to listen to the word of God; and some of the more lively and enthusiastic of the assembly stood with their arms extended in the form of a cross, in order to remind themselves and others more forcibly of Him who died upon the cross that they might live for ever.

The younger and least instructed of the congregation were then placed in order, and catechized by the presbyter on the principles of the Christian faith—a part of the service at which Marcella was well pleased that her daughter should be present, and to which she observed that Medora gave her fixed attention.

A short but very impressive address from Mandatus, and a special prayer for all present—whether believers or inquirers—concluded the service; and the congregation then quietly dispersed in different directions, and returned to their own homes; hoping that the darkness of the night would prevent any unpleasant observation being made as to their movements.

On this subject Marcella felt little uneasiness; for she knew that her husband was engaged that evening at one of the political meetings, or *clubs*, which were then very common in



CHRISTIANS ASSEMBLED FOR WORSHIP.—PAGE 98.

the large cities; and formed as great an attraction to the gentlemen of the fourth century as they do now to those of the nineteenth. As much party spirit was probably shown then as now; and as much animosity and ill-feeling frequently arose.

Since Marcella had been induced to attend the secret meetings in the catacomb, she had rejoiced in the frequency of Sophis' visits to the building where he met his political friends and foes; for it left her time much more at her own disposal. Sophis was a stern man, and was very despotic at home. Still he was much attached to his wife, and placed the most entire confidence in her. She was allowed perfect liberty of action, and of opinion also; and though he had caused his children to be brought up in the religion of his Egyptian forefathers—very little of which he either believed or conformed to himself—he yet permitted his wife to worship what deities she pleased, always excepting that One Deity, before whom all the gods of the heathen must one day be cast down to the dust.

Of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth Sophis knew very little; and therefore, with most of his rank and his nation, he regarded his disciples as weak, deluded fanatics, who suffered hardship and persecution for a mere name; and even sacrificed life, with all its visible, tangible enjoyments, for a dream of future reward that would never be realized.

Sophis was well pleased that his son should embrace the sacerdotal profession, and dedicate himself to the service of Osiris; because he wished the old religion of Egypt to be maintained, and because Orestes was thus placed in a position of power and influence among his countrymen. But he had

not consented to Medora's becoming a priestess, because he wished her to cheer and adorn his home, and then to form a matrimonial connexion that should tend to the further exaltation of the family, and the strengthening of his own party.

The marriage of his eldest daughter—which took place many years before the commencement of our story—was one which had given both him and Marcella great displeasure, and caused them much sorrow. This marriage had been contracted when their daughter was residing with some relatives at a distance, and they had never seen her since. Where she dwelt, or whether she yet lived, they did not even know, or professed not to know. There was some mystery about her history and fate with which Sophis and his wife only were acquainted. He sternly forbade even Medora to mention her sister's name, or to make any inquiry respecting her, but required her to speak and think of her as dead.

Some circumstances connected with the marriage led Sophis to be doubly anxious that Medora—then a child—should be scrupulously brought up in the belief and practice of the Egyptian religion. She was therefore sent to Philæ, to be educated under the care of a sister of his own, named Arsinoë, who bore rule in a sort of female ecclesiastical seminary on the sacred isle. There Orestes was also receiving his education in the sacerdotal college; and there he and his sister remained, with occasional visits to and from their parents, until Medora was considered fit to shine in the gay society of Alexandria, and her brother was so far initiated into the ancient mysteries of Egypt as to be admitted into the priestly order.

Both Orestes and Medora were devoted worshippers of the gods of their ancestors; and, while they rejected all the grosser

superstitions which so grievously defiled the ancient religion, they firmly believed in the existence of one true God, who had delegated his power and his various attributes to eight inferior gods; of whom Neph, or the Spirit of God; Osiris, or Pthah, the creative power of God, also the Lord of Truth; and Amun, or Jupiter, were the chief.

In his mysterious character, Osiris was the greatest of the Egyptian gods—after him who was called the king of the gods—and he was generally represented seated on a throne with Isis, and attended by his son Horus, whose office it was to introduce the dead into his presence, to receive their sentence.

From Orestes, Medora acquired much knowledge of the higher mysteries of religion; and also some acquaintance with the secrets of priestcraft, which were not usually permitted to females, and from which the lower orders of both sexes were carefully excluded.

To Isis—the sister and wife of Osiris—Medora paid especial honours, as we have already said; and to the moon, as one of her emblems, and to the star Sirius, as the reputed abode of her disembodied spirit, she looked up with adoration and delight, as the visible representation of the great goddess.


When residing at Alexandria, she worshipped her favourite divinity in the temple of Serapis. But she loved best to serve her in the temples at Philæ, the beauty of which we shall by-and-bye have occasion more particularly to describe. There was also one drawback to her satisfaction in attending the religious ceremonies that were celebrated in the temple of Serapis; and that was the constant presence of Muthis, whose attentions were always disagreeable to her, and from whom she

shrank the more because she knew that her father favoured his suit, and desired her to become his wife. The only attraction which he had ever possessed in her eyes, was his being a firm upholder of the ancient gods of Egypt; but this was altogether counteracted by his unpleasing manners, and the pride and self-sufficiency of his character. It was her determination never to marry any one whose religion was not the same as her own; but she was equally resolved to remain single all her life rather than unite herself to one whom she could neither esteem nor love.

Gladly would she have altogether avoided the society of Muthis; and, as much as possible, she did so, both in her father's house and elsewhere. But Muthis had assumed a right to take his place near her in the great temple, and to attend her and Pyrrha from thence to their home; and as this was continued with her father's knowledge and sanction, she had no power to prevent it.

It might be that this fact made Medora more willing to listen to all that her mother told her of the Christian place of worship, and more ready to accompany her on the occasion which we have just related; as she thereby avoided encountering Muthis at the temple, where a great sacrifice was that evening to be offered up to the god Serapis, to whom the building was more especially dedicated. Had it been to Isis that the offerings were to have been made, she would hardly have stayed away; but as it was, she gladly took the opportunity of gratifying her curiosity respecting the worship of the followers of Jesus, for which Marcella had abandoned the deities of her own family and nation.

CHAPTER XII.

HILE we have thus endeavoured to make our readers acquainted with the feelings and character of some of the individuals whose story we are telling, Marcella and her daughter, with Justin and Pyrrha, were swiftly but silently pursuing their way along the beach and across the plain, and were approaching the narrow way which would lead them into the open streets of the city.

Hitherto they had met few passengers, and those few had apparently taken no notice of them; but just as they were about to enter the lane, which was thickly overhung with trees, they observed the figure of a man emerge from the shadow, and come directly towards them. Medora shrank behind her mother; and Pyrrha, who feared nothing except for her young mistress, instantly went forward and helped to conceal her from the stranger.

He did not, however, appear to be at all disconcerted; for he walked quietly up to Marcella, and in a voice which caused Medora both surprise and fear—for she recognised it as that of Muthis—he said:

“I missed Medora from her place in the great temple this evening; and as she is the being who rules my destiny, and at whose shrine I worship, I ventured to seek her in her home. There I heard that she had dutifully accompanied you, Mar-

cella, in a walk by the sea-side. It seemed a late hour for such an expedition; and as neither moon or stars are visible—either for Medora to pour forth her adoration to as the emblems of her goddess, or to light her steps homewards—I presumed to come this way to offer my services as her escort.”

There was something sarcastic in the tone of Muthis that excited both alarm and indignation in the breast of Medora; but she kept silence, and her mother replied, rather proudly:

“I am sorry you should think any further escort necessary than that which I have provided for my daughter. She is quite safe under my protection and that of our attendants.”

“I saw your own servant at your house, and he it was who told me in what direction you were gone. Now,” he added, glancing towards Justin, “I see you are attended by a stranger.”

“By one on whom I can depend,” said Marcella, coldly, “and therefore I need not give you any further trouble. Allow me to thank you for your attention, and to wish you good night.”

“Does Sophis know that you are fond of evening walks by the sea-side?” inquired Muthis, still keeping his place in front of Marcella, and thus preventing her from advancing on her way. “And does he know that the plain you have just crossed is full of ancient sepulchres, and that there are dangerous openings into dark and gloomy catacombs, which may be frequented by robbers, or by persons still more to be feared?”

Muthis laid a peculiar emphasis on the last few words, and then he paused, as if to observe their effect on Marcella. She made no reply: she felt that there was a deeper meaning in the questions of Muthis than the words expressed, and she

feared to show either her anger or her suspicions. She had never liked the Egyptian ; and it had only been in accordance with her husband's wishes, and from a consideration of the friendship which her son entertained for him, that Muthis had been admitted to her house on terms of intimacy. She knew his influence with Sophis, and she dreaded that eventually Medora would be either persuaded or compelled to accept him as a husband. Of all the inhabitants of Alexandria there was therefore not one whom she would not have preferred to have met at this particular juncture. She knew not what to reply, so she kept silence.

After a pause, during which Marcella knew that the dark eyes of Muthis were fixed on her countenance ; and—even in the evening gloom, were reading its varied expression—the wily Egyptian continued :

“ Might it not be an act of kindness to my excellent friend, and also to his wife and daughter, if I were to give him a hint of the dangers to which those most dear to him are exposed, by indulging their tastes for late evening rambles in desolate and secluded places ? I would not willingly omit anything in my power to preserve the lovely and unsuspecting Medora, and you, her excellent mother, from peril of any kind,—and more especially of that kind which is most to be dreaded in the plain which you have just crossed, and among the ruins and caves which are there so abundant.”

The spirit of Marcella was roused by the insinuations and the malicious manner of Muthis, and she answered proudly—

“ I can inform my husband when I find either my daughter or myself threatened with any peril. We are the best judges

of the times and places when and where it suits us to take exercise. I pray you let us pass—we wish to return to our home.”

“You will find Sophis there before you. I met him returning from the club, which broke up this evening at an early hour. How will you account to him, Marcella, for being absent at such a time of night?”

“Muthis,” replied Marcella, more gently—for her anger was giving place to fear—“Muthis, I perceive that you have a further meaning for all that you say. I perceive that you have some suspicions connected with our being here this evening. If so, I entreat you to tell me their nature, and not to communicate those suspicions to my husband until you have heard my reply to your accusations. You know that Sophis has strong prejudices.”

“I know that he has strong national feelings, and a great contempt for superstition and fanaticism,” replied Muthis, as, with a triumphant smile, he turned to accompany Marcella along the shadowy lane, and no longer opposed her progress. Medora and Pyrrha followed closely, and anxiously listened to the conversation, while Justin walked a little in advance, to guide the party on their way.

“It is because I am so well acquainted with the opinions and sentiments of Sophis,” continued Muthis, in a decided and measured tone, “that I am so earnestly desirous to warn you, Marcella, of the danger to which you are exposing yourself and your daughter. You know my love for her—you know that to obtain her hand there is no sacrifice I would not make, and no hardship I would not endure. Sophis and Orestes are

resolved to give Medora's hand only to an Egyptian by birth, and an Egyptian in faith: I am both—and the land of the Nile contains none of purer blood, or more entire devotion to the religion of our great ancestors. To these recommendations I can add that which wealth bestows, and which most women prize highly. I say nothing of personal advantages,"—and Muthis drew up his really fine and well-dressed figure to its full height, and gave a self-complacent glance towards Medora, as he proceeded—"such points are matters of taste; and your lovely daughter knows best whom and what she admires."

"To what does all this tend?" asked Marcella, rather hastily.

"Simply to this," answered Muthis: "I have waited patiently, hoping each day to find my attentions more favourably received, but in vain. I have sought to discover the cause of Medora's indifference, but hitherto equally in vain. Once I fancied that another was preferred before me; but a moment's calm reflection showed me that such a preference was impossible."

"By no means," said Medora to herself, almost aloud.

"But at length," continued Muthis, in the same calm, monotonous tone, "at length I believe the mystery is explained. I have long known that you, Marcella, were a secret listener to the absurd doctrines of the Nazarenes; but so long as Medora was at Philæ, and safe from the vile contagion, it mattered little whether you worshipped Jupiter and Juno, or the crucified son of a Jewish peasant. I also hoped that before her return your eyes would be opened to the folly of such a fantastic faith. Since your daughter came back to Alexandria I have watched

your proceedings more narrowly than you are at all aware of. I was jealous for the religious principles of my future wife, and I carefully observed her in the temple, and noted with satisfaction the regularity of her attendance, and the costliness of her offerings to our great goddess. This continued for a time ; but latterly I have perceived an abstraction in her manner during the sacred ceremonies, that has filled my mind with anxious doubts and fears. I am well aware that the wilder and more unreasonable any new doctrine may be, the more readily is it received, and the more widely does it spread ; and this alone can account for the great diffusion of the faith of the Nazarenes, and the obstinacy of its followers. Might not even the pure mind of Medora become infected by this spiritual pestilence, especially when she knew her mother to have become one of its willing victims ? With this apprehension I looked in vain this evening for your daughter bending as usual before the shrine of Isis. She came not—and I knew that the Nazarenes were to hold a secret meeting. You start, Marcella—but I know all their movements. I sought for Medora at her father's house, and I was informed that she had gone out with you and Pyrrha on foot. Instantly I repaired to the spot where I met you, and by which I knew you must pass. I wished to warn you—I wished to counsel you to escape from the snares of these wily fanatics before you have taken any irrevocable step. Marcella !” he continued, in a more passionate and excited manner—and he stopped suddenly and grasped her arm, while he confronted the agitated Medora, and gazed earnestly at her pale and anxious countenance—“ Marcella, hear me ! I do not wish to betray you to the anger and just indignation of Sophis ; I do not wish to arouse perse-

cution against your insane associates; but I solemnly declare to you, that unless you pledge yourself that Medora shall never again be present at any of your mysterious meetings, and also that you will employ all your influence and all your authority to induce her to become my bride without any further delay, I will make known to Sophis all I have myself become acquainted with, and will leave him to deal with both you and his daughter. I know that he can be stern and inflexible—and so do you !”

Marcella trembled; she feared the anger of her husband, and she feared even more the reproaches of her pagan friends and connexions. She was about to attempt half measures with the Egyptian, and to try the effect of persuasion, in order to shake his determination, and so at least to gain time. But Medora rightly interpreted her mother's hesitation, and she advanced to her side, and fixed her eyes on Muthis: then in a resolute voice, though with pale and quivering lips, she addressed him:

“I am not a Christian, Muthis, and I have no intention of becoming one. I am a devoted worshipper of the ancient gods of Egypt. At the same time I respect the principles of the Christians, and I admire their conduct. Rather than again sit by and see them murdered, as I saw them in the Circus, I would unite myself to their cause, and die with them. But enough of this. If you are cowardly and unmanly enough to act as a spy on my mother's actions, and then to use your cunningly acquired knowledge to injure her happiness and her reputation—be it so; but I tell you plainly, you will gain nothing by your artifices or your malice—I never will become your wife. I have endeavoured to show you that it was useless for you to

seek to gain my affections ; it would therefore be worse than useless for you to endeavour to obtain my hand. You are my brother's friend, and I would gladly have you for my friend also. We can never be anything more to each other. Let me, then, entreat you to prove the regard which you profess for me, and for which I thank you, by looking on me only as the sister of Orestes, and abstaining from all further mention of our marriage to my father. Promise me this, Muthis, and I freely offer you my friendship and my gratitude."

As Medora spoke, she held out her hand to Muthis, and a sweet smile lighted up her countenance. She thought that her persuasions must prove effectual ; but she did not know the character of him whom she hoped to move by motives of generosity and kindness.

Muthis caught her hand, but not in the spirit in which she had tendered it.

"It shall be mine !" he exclaimed. "Willingly or unwillingly you shall give this hand to me, and no other shall possess it. I will appeal to Sophis !"

Medora attempted to withdraw her hand, but Muthis held it as in a vice. Then offended dignity came to her aid, and, drawing up her tall graceful figure, she stood perfectly still, and said in a firm voice—

"I also will appeal to my father. He loves me, and he will not suffer me to be insulted : far less will he seek to compel me to accept as a husband a man who condescends first to act the part of a spy, and then that of a ruffian."

Fire flashed from the eyes of Muthis at this well-merited reproach. But he did not loose the hand of Medora ; he only



MUTHIS AND MIDORA.—PAGE 108.

crushed it in his own till the tears started to her eyes with pain. She still remained motionless, waiting for his reply, and scorn-
ing to show her indignation at his violence. Setting his teeth firmly, and speaking in a low, deep voice, he said—

“Your father loves his country and his gods more than he loves his child. Your father is a man of honour, and he has pledged himself that you shall be my wife. Your father is a stern man, and he has already cast off one daughter who disobeyed him; he may cast off another. We shall see!”


With these words he flung back her hand, and strode away into the darkness, leaving Medora and her mother greatly agitated, and full of apprehension for the future.

When they reached their home, they found that Sophis had retired to the luxurious bath-room, where he was, according to the custom of the time, enjoying the society of some friends. They therefore hastened to their own apartments, rejoicing to escape for the present any awkward interrogatories, and full of anxiety as to the part which it was now their duty to take.

To their very unpleasant meditations we must now leave them, and return to Milan, to follow Alypius and his friend Augustine through trials and conflicts of a different nature.



CHAPTER XIII

T the period of our story, Milan was a royal residence. So early as the third century, Maximinius, who reigned over the western empire, as the colleague of Diocletian, took up his abode there; and he surrounded the city with strong walls, which extended to a circumference of two miles. The Emperors Valentinian the second, Theodosius the first, and others of the fourth and fifth centuries also, made Milan their occasional place of residence; and, at the time when Augustine established himself in the capital of Lombardy, the former of these sovereigns kept his court there.

With the proceedings of that court we have very little to do, except as they regard one of the friends of Augustine, and his pious and long-suffering mother, Monica.

Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, had long been contending with the followers of Arius, of whom Justina, the widow of Valentinian the first, was a decided patroness. After the death of her husband, she openly endeavoured to instil her heretical opinions into the mind of the youthful emperor, and to induce him to compel Ambrose, by threats and persecution, to cease from opposing the pernicious doctrines of the Arians.

The bishop was not, however, to be thus deterred from his duty, and he earnestly exhorted the emperor to hold fast and

support the doctrine delivered by the apostles. But it seems that Valentinian was more under the influence of his mother than of the bishop ; for he one day commanded his body-guards to surround the church in which Ambrose was ministering, and then ordered the prelate to come forth with his congregation. The reply of the holy man was worthy of a soldier and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ : " I shall not willingly give up the sheep of Christ to be devoured by wolves. You may use your swords and spears against *me* ; such a death I shall freely undergo."

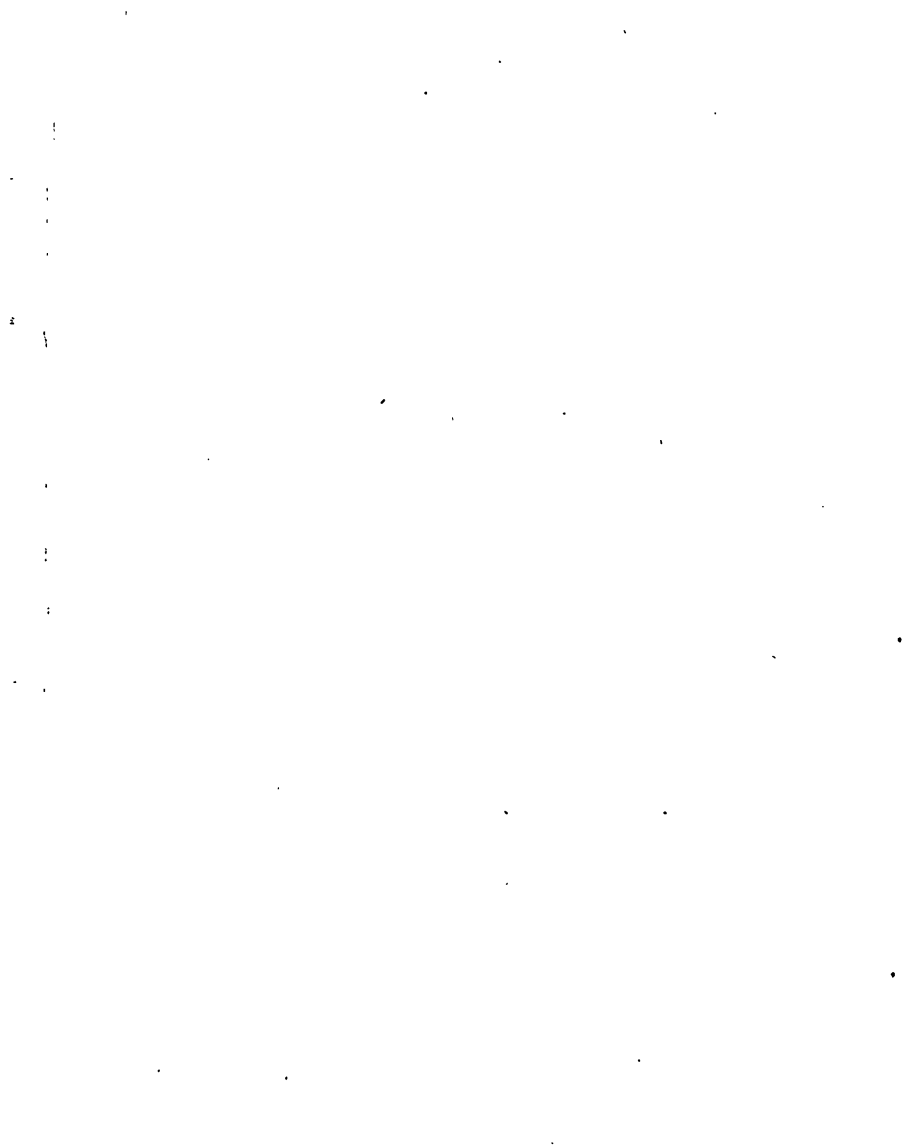
The emperor did not then proceed to any further violence ; but the bishop was continually exposed to the artifices and the opposition of Justina, who feared to make any more open attacks upon him, as she found that the people of Milan were generally inclined to support him, and that he also exercised no little influence in the court and the council of her son.

By his talents in negociation, Ambrose was instrumental in averting from the city of Milan, for a time, the invasion of the usurper Maximus. But even this good service did not soften the animosity of Justina ; and in the year 386 she persuaded Valentinian to pass a law permitting the Arians to assemble, without any interference from the bishop.

Her next step was to introduce the Arian teacher, Auxentius, into the city ; and he immediately sent a challenge to Ambrose, inviting him to hold a controversy on their respective doctrines in the imperial palace. But the bishop wrote to Valentinian, boldly declaring that it was no part of the emperor's business to decide on points of theology ; and adding, " Let him come to



SOLDIERS SENT BY THE EMPEROR TO COERCE AMBROSE.—PAGE 112.



the city, were claimed for the occupation of the heretical sect. One sabbath day Ambrose went to baptize several persons, who were prepared for that ordinance, when he was told that officers had been sent to take possession of the Portian church. He still calmly continued the service, until a hasty messenger informed him that some of his people, having met Castulus, an Arian presbyter, in the street, had laid violent hands on him. Then the holy man was moved to prayers and tears, and he besought God that no man's blood might be shed; but that, if anyone were to suffer, it might rather be himself, who was ready to be offered up, not only for the pious, but also for the wicked. He then immediately sent some presbyters and deacons, who rescued Castulus from the hands of the populace.

After this incident the court issued warrants for the apprehension of several citizens; and soon the prisons were filled with merchants and tradesmen, who were guilty of no crime but that of adhering to the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity in Unity. Many of these were bound in chains; and large sums of money were extorted from them, which they declared they would willingly pay if it could secure to them the unmolested profession of their faith.

Many of the city magistrates and men of high rank were harshly threatened, and the emissaries of the government urged Ambrose to submit to the imperial authority; but he answered with the same loyalty and firmness as before. "The Holy Spirit," said he, in his exhortation to the people, "has spoken in you this day, to this effect, *Emperor, we entreat, but we do not fight.*" Nevertheless, the Arians, knowing how

unpopular they were in the city, feared to show themselves in the streets; and a notary was sent to Ambrose, from the emperor, to ask him "whether he intended to usurp the empire?"

The reply of the bishop to this insulting inquiry shows what manner of spirit he was of. "I have an empire, it is true," said he, meekly, "but it lies in weakness; according to the saying of the apostle, '*When I am weak, then am I strong.*' Even Maximus will clear me of this charge, since he will confess that it was through my embassy he was kept from the invasion of Italy."

The court were wearied by his resolution; and, as the object of Justina and her son had been rather to obtain the bishop's sanction of Arianism than to exercise violence, they desisted from their persecution; and the guards were removed from the church, in which they had kept Ambrose and his congregation imprisoned the whole night, during which time they had employed themselves in singing psalms and hymns to the glory of God, after the example of Paul and Silas.

Now, like the apostles, they were set free; and the money which had been extorted from the tradesmen was restored. Peace was thus re-established for a time; but Ambrose knew that he had still reason to fear for his own safety; and, in a letter which he addressed at that time to his sister, he expressed a hope "that God would defend his church from all her enemies, and let them satiate their rage in his blood."

Again, at this juncture, Maximus threatened to invade Italy. This formidable threat threw the court of Milan into the greatest trepidation; and again Justina condescended to seek

aid from the man whom she had reviled and persecuted, and she entreated Ambrose to undertake another embassy to the usurper. The bishop cheerfully consented ; and he executed his mission with his usual ability and fortitude. This time he was not, however, successful—he could not stay the progress of the enemy. But the emperor Theodosius, who then reigned at Constantinople, came to the assistance of his colleague Valentinian, and put an end to the usurpation and the life of Maximus.

By the judicious influence of this Christian prince, the young emperor was induced to abandon his mother's heretical principles, and to embrace those of Ambrose ; to which, in form at least, he adhered till his death, which occurred in the year 392. He was then engaged in quelling another usurpation in the west ; and, finding death approaching, he sent for Ambrose to baptize him. The bishop immediately set out to comply with the request ; but while on his journey he heard that Valentinian had expired, at which he was deeply affected, and wrote to Theodosius, expressing his sorrow, and his hope that the young emperor had died a sincere Christian.

The death of Valentinian did not take place until five years after the period at which our story has arrived ; but we have alluded to it in order to exhibit more clearly the charity, the generosity, and the indomitable firmness of the venerable Ambrose.

Such, then, was the pastor who presided over the Christian community of Milan towards the close of the fourth century. Such was the man by whose instrumentality the seed of true faith was sown in the heart of Augustine, and the germ of a

saving repentance was implanted in his soul ! The good seed was watered by the tears, and breathed on by the prayers, of a faithful and a loving mother, and it was strengthened by communion with his anxious and inquiring friend Alypius ; but it was God alone who gave the increase, and brought forth abundant fruit in this “ brand snatched from the burning.”



CHAPTER XIV.

TOGETHER Augustine and Alypius had tried to find happiness and peace in the pleasures of the world, and in the purer, but not more satisfying pursuits of philosophy, and intellectual exercises. Together they had proved the utter incapability of any such objects to fill the aching, craving void of an immortal spirit, that has not sought and found its rest in God. And together they were moved, by the providence of God, to give themselves to an earnest and unprejudiced study of the Epistles of St. Paul.

The desire of the friends to enter into the spirit of these inspired writings, and no longer, as formerly, to cavil at the letter, was now at length sincere; and, as might be anticipated, it was gratified. The veil which had so long obscured the spiritual vision of both these talented young men, seemed to be removed; and, in the light of God's Spirit, they read the sacred words with understanding. The difficulties which had so long proved stumbling-blocks in their way now disappeared, and the gospel no longer seemed to disagree with the Law and the Prophets. The doctrines which were set forth so clearly and so eloquently in the discourses of Ambrose approved themselves to the reason and the judgment of the young students; and it only remained that their hearts should be warmed, and their affections stirred up.

This blessed work was partially effected by the pious conversation of the aged Simplician, once a presbyter at Rome, but then residing at Milan. Simplician was a man of eminent learning and piety, and had been greatly instrumental in the instruction of Ambrose in the vital truths of Christianity; and he was by him sincerely loved and revered. It now pleased God to make him useful in the conversion of another distinguished luminary of the Christian church, and in conveying to Augustine that holy love and genuine simplicity in religion which had so sadly decayed away in the professing Christian church.

To Simplician, Augustine confessed the sins of his past life, and the infidel notions which he had nourished in his breast; and from the venerable and judicious presbyter he received such counsel and such encouragement as he could venture to give to one who had so often backslidden.

Augustine was convinced, but he was not converted. His moral courage failed him when he thought of the self-denial and self-sacrifice that would be required to enable him to "confess Christ before men," and he held back from the effort. Still he continued his scriptural studies with his friend Alypius; and, to their great satisfaction, they were at this time joined by their mutual friend Pontianus, whom they had known intimately in Africa.

This young man had already become a sincere convert to Christianity; and, as is ever the case with those who have found the heavenly treasure, he earnestly desired that others should share the blessing which had been vouchsafed to himself.

One evening he was the guest of Augustine, at a small house which the latter had taken for a time, at a little distance from Milan; and he was engaged in serious conversation with him and Alypius. Among other instances of conversion which he held up for their example and encouragement, he told them the story of an Egyptian named Anthony, who had lately renounced all intercourse with the world, and retired to dwell in utter solitude, devoting his life to the worship of God, and to holy meditation.

The spirit of monasticism had then only just entered the church. The novelty of the idea was very striking to the mind of Augustine, and his ardent and imaginative spirit was fired with emulation at the account of such devotion and self-sacrifice. He saw the selfishness and the vileness of his own heart as he had never seen it before; and at the same time, he was permitted also to obtain a view of the only way of escape, the only way of salvation.

He drew back from the table, on which were spread the remains of a rich repast that he had prepared for his friends. He started to his feet, and fixing his earnest eyes on Alypius, he exclaimed in a deep and tremulous voice—

“What aileth us, my brother? The unlearned strive and take heaven by force: and we, with all our learning, lo! how we wallow in sin!”

There was a wildness in the look of Augustine, and an energy in his manner, that startled, and almost alarmed his friends. They were about to reply to his passionate appeal, and to endeavour to calm his agitation, but he rushed from the apartment in which they had been seated, and sought to hide his deep

emotion among the trees of a garden adjoining the house. Here Alypius followed him, to soothe his distress, and to sympathize in his penitent and self-condemning feelings.

"His presence," wrote Augustine—when describing in his "Confessions" this important hour of his life, "his presence did not lessen my feeling of privacy. Indeed how could he forsake me, so distressed!"

The friends sat down together as far as possible from the house; and they communed together of the things which concerned their immortal souls—the worth and the danger of which they had never before so clearly perceived.

Augustine was sorely troubled in spirit; and such was the anguish of his soul, that the calmer Alypius even feared for his reason, and forgot his own anxiety in his care for his beloved friend.

Again Augustine turned a deaf ear to all that Alypius could say in the way of comfort or encouragement. Again he started up, and left his companion, to seek for more entire solitude in a distant and secluded part of the garden; and there Alypius heard him giving way to his long pent-up and tumultuous feelings, and crying out in a tone of piteous appeal: "How long? how long? To-morrow and to-morrow shall I find the way? Why not *now*?"

While in this state of deep distress, he threw himself on the ground beneath a sycamore tree, and gave himself up to self-reproach, and almost to despair. All seemed dark within him and around him, and he hid his face in his hands to shut out the light of day.

Suddenly his attention was aroused by a sweet sound that

came to him from above, and seemed to his excited imagination as an angel's voice calling to him in a melodious chant.

"Take and read! Take and read;" were the words that reached his ear; and he received them as a Divine message sent for his guidance in this moment of sore tribulation. The voice was indeed that of a young child singing to her companions as they were at play together in an adjoining house that overlooked the garden; but who shall say that this simple circumstance was not one appointed link in the chain of events that was designed and overruled for the conversion of Augustine, and his preparation to be a chosen vessel in the hand of his Master?

Augustine listened to the words as to a special answer to his plaintive appeal. He immediately rose up and returned to the house, and opened the copy of St. Paul's Epistles, to which his attention had of late been so much directed. His eyes fell on the concluding verses of the 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

These words appeared to Augustine to be words of light and life—words of guidance and of hope. Instantly, by a light, as it were, infused into his heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away. He closed the sacred volume, and went to Alypius; who at once perceived, by the calmness of his

manner, and the serenity of his countenance, that the anguish and the struggle of his soul had passed away.

"Where have you found such peace, my friend?" he asked, with much emotion.

"Behold the blessed words!" replied Augustine. "Read for yourself, Alypius; and rejoice, as I do, in the hope of salvation."

Alypius took the book, and read what Augustine pointed out to him. Then he went on to the following verse, and uttered these words: "Him that is weak in the faith receive." This he applied to himself and to Augustine; and they both derived great comfort and encouragement from meditating on these words of inspiration.

"O Alypius!" exclaimed Augustine; "your calm resolution, and ready reception of the truth, are an example to me. It is in accordance with your character, which was always far better than mine, and not given to such turbulent doubts and indecisions. Let us go to my mother."

"How will the pious Monica rejoice to see you in your present frame of mind!" said Alypius. "Me, too, she has treated as a son, and has sought to lead me into the right way. We will return together to Milan this very evening, and tell her that we have found that peace which we have both so long sought in vain."

Pontianus saw them re-enter the apartment in which they had so lately left him, under such great trouble and agitation. Now their countenances expressed the serenity of their hearts; and he glorified God for them and with them.

Then they all returned to the city; and Augustine hastened with his friend to his mother's dwelling.

Monica had mourned over her son's infidelity and depravity for many long and weary years ; she had wept, and prayed, and hoped—yes, hoped even against hope, for his precious, erring, obdurate soul. And now we may imagine better than we can describe her feelings, when at length the prodigal came home, and confessed that he had sinned against heaven and against her !

She did not now doubt his sincerity as she had once done, when, in his boyhood, he had begged to receive the rite of baptism. Then she saw that he was merely influenced by a temporary fear of death, and that no real change had taken place in him. Now she felt assured that he was moved by the Holy Spirit ; and that he looked back with real abhorrence on his past life of scepticism and sin. In Augustine's own words, "She triumphed, and blessed God."

Through all Augustine's years of guilt and perversity, he had always continued affectionately attached to his mother, and had habitually treated her with great openness and candour. Monica knew all the workings of his active mind ; and she had ever retained his confidence and respect, as well as his love. She had never lost her influence over him ; and, therefore, his first impulse was to seek his excellent and devoted mother, and to tell her what he well knew would repay her for years of anxious watching and bitter disappointment.

"I knew," she cried, as she fondly embraced the penitent, and tears of joy flowed down her pale and furrowed cheeks, that had so often been wetted with the bitter drops of anguish and of dread ; "Oh, I knew that the words would be at length

fulfilled : ‘ *The son of so many prayers and tears could never be suffered to perish !* ’ ”

Then, kneeling down with the two young men—who were both deeply moved—she prayed and gave thanks to the Lord for his great mercy vouchsafed unto her ; and, as she rose, she laid her hand on Augustine’s head, and said solemnly : “ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. I have prayed to see this day ; and thou, O my God, hast mercifully answered my prayer.”

From this time Augustine resolved that his conduct should be in conformity with his new thoughts and feelings. He broke off all connection with his heathen friends and associates. The vacation of the vintage was near at hand ; and until that time he made up his mind to endure the society which was now so uncongenial to him ; but when these trying days were over, he resigned his office of teacher of rhetoric, and took leave of all his pupils, whose affection he had won by his engaging and affable manners ; while his brilliant talents had commanded their admiration and respect.

His friendship for Alypius had long been warm and sincere ; and now the bond which united them was strengthened by their fellowship in Christian feeling. They had passed through much of their spiritual conflicts together ; and they resolved to be united in the public act of being enrolled among the members of Christ’s visible church on earth.

In preparation for this solemn act, Augustine and Alypius retired from Milan to a village at some distance, where they might devote themselves to prayer and meditation, and to the reading of God’s word. In this journey they were accompanied

by a third individual, who was to share their holy occupations, and to be associated with them in the rite of baptism.

This was no other than the young Adeodatus, a son of Augustine's, and now about fifteen years of age. His mother had left Milan some time previously, and had retired to Africa ; but Augustine had retained the boy with himself ; and he was very tenderly attached to him. Indeed, he appears to have been deserving of his father's affection ; for, according to his own account, Adeodatus was "excellently made, though born in sin ; and of rare wit and talents, surpassing those of many learned men. Him, therefore, we joined with us, our contemporary in grace, to be brought up in Thy discipline."

Strange as it may appear, Augustine had caused his son to be brought up in the pure tenets of the Christian religion. He had himself experienced all the misery of scepticism, and all the weary emptiness of philosophy ; and doubtless both his heart and his understanding compelled him to believe that Adeodatus would be a better and a happier man if he were taught to follow in the footsteps of his pious grandmother, Monica, rather than if he were to wander in all the devious paths which his father had trod, and which had led to nothing but disappointment.


On the return of the little party to Milan, Baptism and the Lord's Supper were administered to them by Ambrose, after they had, in the presence of the assembled congregation, openly professed their adherence to the doctrines of the gospel, and their sincere desire to be admitted into Christ's church, and to fight under his banner.

This solemn ceremony took place in the year 387, and in the

thirty-second year of Augustine's age. The recently introduced custom of chanting was observed on this occasion; and so greatly was the sensitive nature of Augustine affected by the grand and touching melody that arose from the congregation, that he wept abundantly, "touched to the quick," as he himself expressed it, "by the hymns and canticles; the voices flowing into my ears, and the truth into my heart."



CHAPTER XV.

UGUSTINE having renounced the profession of rhetoric, and resolved to become a minister of that gospel which he had so long despised, determined to leave Milan, and return to his native land ; where he hoped that his ministrations might be blessed to the conversion and the spiritual improvement of his own countrymen.

A short time sufficed for preparation ; for Monica was as anxious as her son to leave Milan, and to return to her home and her friends in Africa. She had also a prophetic feeling that her life was drawing to a close ; and she greatly desired to be buried in her own land.

The long, and, at that time, toilsome journey, was soon commenced. The travelling party consisted of Augustine, his mother, his son, and his friend, Alypius, who was resolved to follow him whithersoever he might bend his steps. These Christian disciples all hoped to enjoy many years of happy fellowship, and of much usefulness together at Tagaste ; but "man proposes, and God disposes ;" and their hopes were not to be altogether accomplished.

The travellers arrived at Ostia, intending to go from thence to Rome, and to remain there for some time before sailing for Africa. But the fatigue of the journey had already been more than the declining strength of Monica could bear. She was

taken ill soon after they reached Ostia ; and Augustine would not consent to her proceeding to Rome, but resolved to remain in their present abode until her health was re-established.

This, however, was not the will of God concerning his tried and faithful servant. It seemed as if the purpose of Monica's life was fully accomplished, now that the son of her love and her care was gathered into the fold of Christ. Her soul had long aspired to the joys of heaven ; and soon they were to be her portion.

Monica could look calmly forward to the termination of her earthly career ; and she cheerfully resigned the long-cherished hope of again beholding her native land, and the friends whom she had known from her youth. She had earnestly desired once more to see Calanthe, to hear from her own lips a confession of her Christian faith, and to strengthen her in the pure and holy doctrines of the gospel. But even this hope she relinquished willingly, knowing that the Lord, who had begun the good work in her friend's soul, would assuredly complete and perfect it, and that he would provide a fitting instrument to carry out his gracious purpose.

It was hard for Augustine to realize the approaching separation from his beloved mother—now dearer to him than ever, since he had learned to share her faith on earth and her hopes for heaven. But he saw that she gradually declined in strength ; and he also saw that as “the outward man decayed, the inward man was renewed day by day ;” and the departing Christian was becoming more and more “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Many were the deeply interesting conversations that were

held by this mother and son during the last days of their earthly intercourse; and brightly did Monica's tender affection for her only child burn on to the very last. Her soul was lifted up in fervent prayer for him, and with him; and her greatest delight was in holding spiritual communion with him who had so often caused her the bitterest grief, and who was now the source of her grateful joy.

Augustine watched his mother with the fondest care and gentleness; and, in his "Confessions," he has left us a touching record of the latest scenes of her life. One of these descriptions has been made the subject of a very lovely picture,* which must be admired and appreciated by every one who has either a feeling heart or an artist's eye.

Augustine stood by his mother's side at a window of their lodging while she reclined in a chair; and they looked down together on the ever-flowing waters of the Tiber, and listened to its soothing but monotonous sound. The day had been sultry, and Monica's weakness had visibly increased, warning her son that he could not hope long to retain her on earth. The evening breeze had, however, revived her; and she could once more enjoy sacred communion with him whom she loved so well.

They talked of death—of *death*, whose sting has been destroyed, and which is to the Christian only the gate of heaven. And they talked of what should be after death, when they should attain to the land of everlasting rest and joy.

"Yea," he says in his own expressive language, "we were soaring yet higher by inward musing and discourse, and by admiring of Thy works, that we might arrive at that region of

* "The Death of Monica," by Ary Scheffer.

never-failing plenty, where thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth."

Then they paused awhile, and kept silence; and again no sound broke the stillness but the rippling of the ever-rolling river.

The mother and son were communing in spirit all the while; and ere long they spoke again. He gives us their uttered thoughts in some such words as these :—

"We were saying, then, that if, even now, in this our bodily state, the tumult of the flesh were entirely hushed—hushed the images of earth, and water, and air; yea, the very soul hushed to herself—hushed all dreams and imaginary revelations—hushed every tongue and every sign; and He alone should speak, not through any tongue of flesh, or angel's voice, or sound of thunder, but so that we might hear *his very self* in the depth of our soul—could this be continued, and all other visions be withdrawn, and this one absorb and ravish the spirit, even with these inward joys, so that life might be filled with that heavenly communion which now we sighed after,—would not this be to realize the blessed sentence, '*Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*'?"

Such were the heavenly aspirations of the enthusiastic and highly imaginative Augustine; and Monica shared his spiritual exaltation.

"Oh, my son!" she replied, as she raised her eyes, now beaming with holy joy and hope, towards the heaven where her heart had long been fixed, "oh, my son, when shall that be? For mine own part, I have no further delight in anything in this life. What I do here any longer, or to what end I am

here, I know not—now that all my hopes in this world are accomplished. One thing there was, for which I desired to linger for a while on the earth—that I might see thee, my beloved Augustine, a true Christian before I died. My gracious God hath now done this for me more abundantly than I could have hoped ; for I see thee despising earthly happiness and earthly advancement, and become his devoted servant. What do I here any longer ? ”

“ Mother,” replied Augustine, with much emotion, as he seated himself at her feet, and took her hand in his, and looked up with her into the deep blue sky, “ Mother, it will be lonely for me on earth when you are gone. Yet how can I wish to retain you here when your spirit is so ready for heaven ? What is my love for you, or even yours for me, compared to that love of God which passeth all understanding—that love wherewith he has loved us, and which in some measure he has also implanted in my erring and wandering heart—how much more in yours ? He will recompense you for all your love to me ; and he will abundantly satisfy all the desires of your soul towards himself.”

“ Yes, my son : the Lord will give much more than we either desire or deserve. I know that henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory—and not for me only, but for all them also that love his appearing. I know that I love him ; and I glory in this, not because it gives me any claim upon his mercy, but because I know that my love to him is a proof that *he first loved me*. And I know, also, that all whom he loves are safe, and that no man, no devil, shall ever pluck them out of his hand. But, Augustine, I likewise know that I have not either

loved or served him as I ought ; and for this I now feel shame and sorrow, because herein I have failed to testify my gratitude for his full, and free, and unmerited salvation."

"The path of the righteous is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Thus was it with Monica—and thus did her light shine before men—and thus did she, and those who marked her faith and her holiness, glorify her Father which is in heaven. It has been well said by a modern writer, "The Christian shines like the sun—not because he purposes to shine, but because he is full of light." And such is the light that guides other souls into the strait and narrow way, and lures them to enter the path that leads to heaven.

"The shock of ripe corn " was soon to be gathered into the garner of the Lord. Only five days after this conversation between Augustine and his mother—and while the party still tarried at Ostia, with little hope that Monica would ever leave the place—she was seized with a fever, which soon reduced her very low. She felt that this was indeed her last sickness, and that her days—and even her hours—were numbered.

Her exhaustion was so great that she fell into a swoon, or fainting fit, in which she lay utterly insensible for a considerable time. Her son and his companions were greatly alarmed, and thought for a while that her spirit had fled. But while they stood around her couch, she revived, and turning towards Augustine, she said, softly—

"My son, here shall you bury your mother. I shall never see Tagaste again."

"Say not so," replied Alypius, who had seen less of her increasing weakness than Augustine, and was more sanguine as to her recovery ; "say not so, dear Monica. I still hope that my mother will welcome you to Tagaste once more, and that we shall all meet, as a Christian party, in her house. It would be sad to leave your loved form here, so far from your country and your home, and the friends to whom you are so dear."

"My children," said the dying saint, as she fixed her now languid eyes in turn on each sad countenance, "my beloved children, ever remember that nothing is far to God. I do not fear that he should not know where to find me at the resurrection."

All were struck by her words, and all were deeply impressed by the solemn manner in which she uttered them. They saw that she was indeed rapidly drawing nigh to the brink of eternity, and that soon the eye which had seen her should see her no more. They stood silently watching her, while tears were in every eye, and sorrow in every heart, except her own.

"Let me bless thee, my son, before I die," she said, faintly.

Augustine knelt before his mother, and she laid her trembling hands upon his head, as he bowed it down on her pillow.

"O Lord, bless my son," she murmured. "Make him to be a light on the earth—give him grace to serve Thee faithfully. Take him for thine own, O God, now in this world, and then may he be mine for ever in heaven."

"Bless my boy also, O mother dearest!" exclaimed Augustine, in a broken voice, as he drew his son to his side.

The youth knelt down, and tears flowed over his blooming cheeks, and dimmed the brightness of his clear blue eyes.

Monica lifted one hand from Augustine's head, and placed it on that of her grandson.

"*Adeodatus* * is thy name, my son ; and truly, though thou wast born in sin, thou hast been a good gift from God, both to thy father and to me. Here, on my death-bed, I give thee back to him. May he keep thee for ever as his own !"

Her voice faltered and ceased ; but her eyes still sought those she loved, and a sweet smile dwelt on her pale features. Soon it died away, as the light of evening fades from the eastern hills when the sun sinks behind the western horizon—and the spirit of Monica had returned to God who gave it.

"I closed her eyes," says Augustine, "and there flowed a mighty sorrow into my heart."

The young Adeodatus fondly loved his grandmother ; and when he saw that she was dead he no longer restrained his grief, but broke out into sobs and lamentations. But Alypius checked this violent expression of his sorrow, by reminding him what a blessed change death must be to Monica, who had so long been preparing to meet her God. Then Adeodatus ceased to weep audibly, and all stood round the bed of death in solemn silence.

Truly the loss of such a mother, and so soon after he had become of one heart and of one mind with her, must have been "a mighty sorrow" to Augustine. He tells us, however, in his own account of this interesting period of his life, that he had many sources of comfort in the remembrance of her watchful care and unfailing love for him, and of the holy and affectionate intercourse which they were permitted to enjoy during her last

* *Adeodatus* means Given by God.

illness. He also dwells fondly and gratefully on her having called him "dutiful" at last—he who had for so many years been most undutiful ; and on her having observed, "with great affection of love," that she had never, even in his wildest days, heard any unkind or disrespectful words addressed to herself.

"And yet, O my God !" he continues, in a passion of grief and self-reproach, "what comparison is there betwixt that honour which I paid to her and her slavery for me? Being then forsaken of so great comfort in her, my soul was wounded, and that life rent asunder as it were, which of hers and mine together had made but one."

The silence which prevailed among the friends who stood around the death-bed of Monica was broken by Alypius, who opened a psalter, and began to sing the 101st psalm : "I will sing of mercy and judgment ; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing."

Many members of the family and household had assembled in the room, and all were deeply impressed by what they had seen and heard in the chamber of the dying Christian. They now united in the song of prayer and praise, and chanted the responses in the manner which had so lately been introduced into the services of the church.

We cannot refrain from another extract from Augustine's account of this time of deep sorrow :—

"Behold," he says, "the corpse was carried to the burial. We went and returned without tears. . . . And then, by little and little, I recovered my former thoughts of thine handmaid, her holy conversation towards thee, her holy tenderness and observance towards us, whereof I was suddenly deprived."

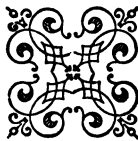
Towards his son the heart of Augustine now turned with

increased affection, and Adeodatus well repaid his love and care. But the comfort which he must have derived from this promising youth was not long continued to him. We know no more of Adeodatus than that he died young; and his father thus speaks of his early removal in a later part of his "Confessions":—


"His talents struck awe into me. But soon didst thou take his life from this earth; and I remember him without anxieties, fearing nothing for his childhood, his youth, or his whole life."

After the death of Monica, Augustine left Ostia with his son and Alypius, and pursued his way to Rome. After some stay there he returned to Tagaste, always accompanied by the faithful Alypius and some other Christian friends. He took up his abode on his own small estate near the town; and there he resided in great retirement, and devoted himself to prayer and the study of the Scriptures; and thus this chosen vessel of the Lord was prepared for that great sphere of usefulness which he was afterwards called to occupy.

There we must now leave him, and return again to Alexandria, and to the family of Sophis the Egyptian.



CHAPTER XVI.

T was summer at Alexandria; and that seat of civilization, and religion, and learning was thronged with students, and visitors, and travellers of every nation and degree.

The streets and squares were crowded, and the busy hum of life rose up from the city. Business, and pleasure, and science were the objects of pursuit to many; politics occupied the thoughts of many more; and a few were devoted to a sincere search after truth, and made the study of the word and the will of God their business, their pleasure, and the end of all learning and all science.

Of these humble, inquiring Christians Marcella was one. Her faith had lately been tried, and it had not failed, and it had gained strength from this first victory.

We left her and Medora anxiously reflecting on their untoward meeting with Muthis, on their return from the Christian assembly, and rejoicing that they were not called on at once to confront Sophis, and to account to him for their unseasonable absence from home.

The dreaded explanation was, however, only deferred. On the following morning Muthis came to the dwelling of Sophis; and demanding admittance to the lady of the house, he was at once ushered into Marcella's private reception-room.

Medora and her mother were seated in the elegantly furnished

apartment, where Marcella was occupied in embroidery, surrounded by several of her maids, similarly engaged; while Medora was singing to the sound of her lute, and trying to banish painful thoughts by the exercise of her favourite accomplishment.

A moment Muthis stood at the door, and the expression of his countenance was softened by admiration as he looked on Medora's graceful figure, and listened to the melody of her sweet voice.

The young girl was not prepared for the appearance of the dark-browed Egyptian. When the heavy curtain was drawn aside from the door-way, she expected to see some of her youthful associates, or some female friend of her mother's. She started as she beheld her unwelcome suitor, and her colour went and came, and fled again, leaving her cheeks deadly pale. A timid and almost apprehensive look was visible in her large averted eyes; but that quickly gave place to an expression of firmness as she forced herself to turn towards Muthis, and to receive his greeting with cool politeness.

"Marcella," said the visitor, as he approached the stately Greek lady, "I desire to have an interview with you alone; or, if it pleases you, your daughter may be present at our conference. The result of it must be decided by herself."

"I think you can have nothing to say to me, Muthis, which my daughter may not hear. I wish her to remain."

Marcella then made a sign to her women to leave the room; and she, Medora, and Muthis remained alone.

"I come," said the latter, in rather a severe and threatening tone of voice, "I come to give you and your daughter an oppor-

tunity of withdrawing the words which last night so justly aroused my surprise and displeasure. I am willing to attribute the lovely Medora's professed rejection of my offered hand to some slight feeling of offence at my anxiety with respect to her fidelity towards the gods of Egypt. I cannot believe that she can be so blind to her own interest as to turn from the many advantages of an alliance with one of the noblest of our ancient families, as well as one of the wealthiest, and the most devoted to the gods of her forefathers. Neither can I suppose that either she or you, Marcella, are prepared to encounter the anger of Sophis when he knows that you have attended a meeting of fanatics; and that his wife—and perhaps his daughter also—is infected with their mischievous and insane doctrines. Pause a moment," he proceeded, with a dignified and rather condescending wave of his hand, as he perceived that Marcella was about to speak, and that Medora's eyes were flashing with indignant impatience—"pause a moment, I pray you both, and reflect, before you utter words of which you may bitterly repent, when it is too late to retract them."

"Repent!" exclaimed Medora, hastily; for she wished to take upon herself the responsibility of replying to the offers of Muthis, and thus to avert from her mother the displeasure of Sophis when he should hear that she had finally rejected them—"I can never repent of refusing a man who dares to threaten me. You have done so once before, Muthis, and your threats are as powerless now as they were last night to move my fixed resolution. I have told you that we may be friends, and nothing more; but if you continue to annoy my mother, I tell you plainly that all intercourse between us must cease, and we

must be as strangers. And now, Muthis, will you agree to these terms ? ”

All the evil passions in the Egyptian's nature became visible in his countenance as he listened to Medora's decision, the sincerity and firmness of which he could not any longer doubt. His eyes glared with anger and revenge from beneath his dark brows, and his teeth were set and his lips compressed, as if to restrain the violent expression of his indignation and insulted pride.

“ I scorn your offered friendship,” he replied, in a low, deep voice, “ a friendship that I now perceive would be but hatred in disguise. But I will have your hand, in spite of your childish resistance. Your father has the right of disposing of you, and he is pledged to me by promises which he will not dare to break. I no longer appeal to your love or your reason in this matter : Sophis will act more wisely for you than either you or your mother seem disposed to do. He will know how to guard you from the machinations of the Nazarenes, and also from the attractions of that young Roman student who hovered about you so assiduously some months ago. Perhaps he also has a leaning towards the doctrines of the Nazarenes.”

Medora's face flushed, and her eyes sparkled with indignation. She did not, however, deign to reply, but turned away and kept silence.

It was now Marcella's turn to speak. All her fears were forgotten, or overmastered by the more powerful feeling of indignation at the insult offered to her daughter.

“ Leave us, Muthis,” she said, firmly and decidedly. “ Go, if it pleases you, to Sophis, and try to disturb the peace of a

—

happy family. You may, indeed, succeed in causing us much misery; but be assured you will gain nothing by your malicious interference."

Marcella drew up her queenly form, and waved her hand as a sign to the Egyptian to depart. Muthis still lingered—he wished to try other ground, and to persuade Marcella again to listen to his arguments, and to use her influence with Medora. But the stately Greek lady was not now to be moved: she took a silver bell from the marble table near which she stood, and rang it sharply. A Nubian slave quickly entered, and waited her commands with a look that showed he was prepared to execute them, whatever they might be.

"The Lord Muthis requires his chariot," she said, coldly; and then, taking up her embroidery, she resumed her seat, and took no further notice of her unwelcome visitor.

Muthis had no choice but to take his departure; and he did so with a very bad grace, and with a determination to carry all his threats into speedy execution.

He immediately repaired to the private cabinet where Sophis transacted his affairs of business, and held small political meetings. He found him engaged with one of the leaders of the political party to which he belonged; and, being requested to remain, he discovered that the Prefect had sent a confidential emissary to propose to Sophis that he should go on an important mission to Constantinople.

The manner in which the proposal was made was flattering, and Sophis very readily acceded to it; and he promised to be prepared to set out in a few days. The official then took his





SOPHIS REQUESTED TO UNDERTAKE AN IMPORTANT MISSION.—PAGE 142.

leave; and Muthis abruptly, and with some confusion of manner, entered on the purpose of his visit.

We will not follow him through all the details by which he sought to prove that he was himself an ill-used man, and that Sophis was grossly deceived both by his wife and daughter. Suffice it to say that the anger of Sophis was greatly aroused, and he expressed much gratitude towards his informant for the zeal and friendship which his conduct had manifested. Again he repeated his promise that Medora's hand should be the reward of Muthis, and he smiled blandly and contemptuously at the bare idea of her having a will of her own on such a subject.

With regard to Marcella's having become a Christian, he looked more grave. He had little fear of Medora proving unfaithful to the gods of Egypt, to whom she had ever shown such extraordinary devotion. But he felt no such security in the faith of Marcella; for he regarded her national religion as nothing but a gross imitation of the ancient mysteries and allegorical representations of the old Egyptian creed and its appropriate ceremonies. We have said before that Sophis had strong prejudices against Christianity, which appeared to him a depraved and vulgar faith, and an exaltation of a crucified malefactor to the dignity of a god. Such a religion was unworthy his grave consideration, and altogether unfit to be introduced into his family. He therefore assured Muthis that he should inquire strictly into the truth of his suspicions, and take such measures as he might find necessary to put an entire stop to Marcella's proceedings.

An interview with his wife and daughter followed this conversation, and it resulted in Marcella's making a full avowal of

her belief in Christianity, and her firm determination never again to return to the worship of idols.


Sophis listened to her with calm displeasure, and contented himself with laying on her a positive command never again, on any pretence, to join any meeting of the Christians, and also to refrain from all attempts to shake the faith of Medora in the religion of her ancestors. More than that he did not require ; for he really loved his wife, and had never sought to control her feelings and opinions on any subject.

With respect to Medora he was much more imperative. He commanded her to give up all inquiries into the doctrines of Christianity, and to devote herself more earnestly than ever to the service of Isis, and the study of such of the Egyptian mysteries as were suitable to the comprehension of a female. For the furtherance of this desirable object, he informed her that he should send her with her attendant, Pyrrha, immediately to Philæ, and place her again under the care of her aunt Arsinoë, and the instruction of her brother Orestes.

He also told her that he considered her as the affianced bride of Muthis ; and that, on her return from the sacred island, he should require her to ratify the engagement which he had made for her, and to prepare for her nuptials with the wealthy and orthodox Egyptian.

Sophis refused to hear one word of remonstrance from either his wife or his daughter. He quietly informed them that his word was law, and must be obeyed ; and he left them to ponder over the future, and to prepare for Medora's immediate removal to Philæ.

CHAPTER XVII.

GAIN we must introduce our readers into the luxurious apartment which Sophis had fitted up with lavish expense and care for the especial comfort of his wife ; and where she had passed many days of happiness and contentment, when her mind was unawakened to the fallacy of her religious belief, and when she was satisfied with the pleasures, and the hopes, and the pursuits of this passing world.

Since those days of ignorance had gone by for ever, and brighter prospects had opened to her soul, Marcella had enjoyed some hours of great spiritual joy in her private apartment, and also had experienced many conflicts, and gone through many trying periods of fear and depression, and of anxious thought for those most dear to her, as well as for herself.

In that chamber Marcella had learned to pray ; and in prayer she had found her best strength and consolation. She had also there studied a portion of the New Testament, which had been given to her as a sacred treasure and a parting gift by one of her Greek Christian friends, when she returned to her native land.

Such was her occupation on the evening of a very sultry day in the end of July, as she reclined on a richly carved couch near an open window which overlooked the gay and fragrant garden. Marcella was alone, for she had dismissed her attendants ; and no sound broke the stillness save the gentle and soothing

fall of water, as it rose from a fountain beneath the window, and fell back again into the marble basin.

Marcella was alone—and she neither feared nor hoped for any interruption to her solitude and her musings; for Sophis had departed on his mission to the eastern capital of the empire, and Medora was in Philæ.


From the open casement several steps of fine marble descended to the flowery parterre, which was ornamented with many statues and vases of very graceful forms. A light breeze just stirred the broad leaves of the trees which overhung the garden, and partially shaded it from the scorching rays of the summer sun. Rich and heavy draperies were hung from the cornice over the casements, and during the heat of the day were always kept carefully closed so as to exclude the heat, and produce a welcome shade in the apartment.

These draperies were now withdrawn, and thrown gracefully round slender columns of marble that were placed on each side of the windows, and were there fastened by rich silk cords and tassels to rings and hooks of gilded bronze.

The beauty and richness of her apartment were lost on Marcella, for her mind was fixed on other and far higher subjects; but the gentle evening breeze and the soft, monotonous sound of the ever-playing fountain had a calming effect on her troubled spirit. She resumed the study which, for a time, she had ceased in order to indulge in painful meditation. The roll of vellum was again unfolded, and again her earnest eyes were fixed on the words of inspiration.

Not long had she read, when a sound of footsteps caught her ear advancing rapidly along the corridor that led to her room.

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She paused as the curtain fell behind her, and she found herself in that apartment. It seemed as if her feet were rooted to the ground as she stood motionless, with her eyes dilated and fixed on Marcella's wondering and agitated face, on which hope, and fear, and doubt were all rapidly depicted.

Soon doubt faded away into certainty.

"Claudia!" she exclaimed, in a wild transport of joy.

"Mother!" replied the stranger, and sank on her knees, with uplifted arms, and pleading, tearful eyes.

In another moment the mother and daughter were locked in each other's arms, with feelings which we shall not attempt to describe.

Much had they to tell and much to ask on points with which we are already acquainted; and while the mother's welcome to her long-lost daughter and Claudia's sad story of sufferings and trials occupied them, Alypius passed through the open casement into the garden, and left them to the uninterrupted indulgence of their feelings and of their mutual curiosity.

It is almost needless to inform our readers that Claudia—the unhappy Claudia—who had been the object of so much interest to Alypius, and of so much benevolent care to his mother, was the elder sister of Medora. We have already related how that once beloved and cherished daughter of Sophis and Marcella had been banished from her home and from her parents' hearts, in consequence of her having united herself to a Christian, and embraced his creed. So entire had been her separation from her family, that her very existence was unknown to them, and for many years they had believed her dead, as well as her husband. Of the birth of her child they had indeed heard;

but what had become of the young Cleon they neither knew nor inquired.

Many had been the hours of painful thought and recollection that Marcella had passed since the departure of her eldest daughter from her home. At the time of her banishment she had shared the strong prejudices of Sophis against the believers in Jesus of Nazareth, and had agreed with him that it would be impossible to permit Claudia and her Christian husband to hold any association with their brother and sister, or even to admit them into their own presence; but after a time the mother's feelings prevailed even over religious bigotry, and Marcella yearned after her child; but she had lost all traces of her, and all knowledge of her fate.

Since Marcella had herself been brought to a knowledge of the gospel, and had learned to love the sacred Name which formerly she had both hated and despised, that yearning had become daily stronger. She longed for the society of that daughter who could fully sympathize in all her new hopes and fears; and from whom, as a more tried and experienced disciple, she might have derived strength, and consolation, and encouragement.

Marcella had long believed that she should never again behold her loved and lamented child on earth; and yet she had often dared to pray that the blessing might be vouchsafed to her; and in the prayer itself she had found comfort.

There was comfort in committing Claudia into the hands of God, and in believing that she was safe in her Redeemer's care, whatever might have befallen her in this world of trial; and there was comfort—unspeakable comfort—in the certainty

that, although she might never see her again with her mortal eyes, she should yet meet and recognise her in heaven, and rejoice with her for ever in the presence of Him who had "washed them from their sins in his own blood."

What joy was it now to Marcella to behold her daughter, and to find her faith even more confirmed by trial, and strengthened by communion with her fellow-Christians ! And what joy was it for Claudia to find in Marcella not only a tender and forgiving mother, but also a sharer in her faith, and a participator in all her heavenly hopes !

After a time Alypius rejoined the happy mother and daughter ; and it was with unfeigned satisfaction that Marcella learned that he also had escaped from the fatal errors of heathen religion and heathen philosophy. But the peace and joy which these three Christians found in their social intercourse was greatly damped by the recollection of Sophis' unabated opposition to the faith they held so dear, and his continued anger towards his daughter, which neither time nor the belief in her death had at all lessened.

Claudia knew his unrelenting character only too well ; and she had entertained little hope of finding his heart softened towards herself or towards her religion. Still she had resolved to return to Alexandria, and to do all in her power to effect a reconciliation with at least some members of her family. She had even cherished a hope of leading her mother and Medora to listen to the doctrines of the blessed gospel—doctrines which, she felt assured, must commend themselves both to their reason and their affections.

She had seen the effect of her simple teaching and her

Christian example on Calanthe; she had seen her doubts removed, and her weak and wavering faith strengthened and settled by constant intercourse with one who believed what she taught, and practised what she believed; and she trusted in the Lord to enable her to exercise a like influence on those whose souls were even more precious to her than that of Calanthe.

Full of such hopes, she had welcomed the new and ardent convert, Alypius, back to Tagaste, and had persuaded him to escort her to Alexandria,—not now to dwell unknown and unacknowledged in the suburbs of the city where her family resided in wealth and luxury,—not now to hide her religion with timid anxiety, and live in daily fear and dread of discovery and persecution. No: Claudia had recovered from the crushing influence of grief and fear; her mind and her body were restored to their natural strength while she dwelt under the sheltering roof of Calanthe, and enjoyed her maternal care. And with her mental and bodily powers, her courage and her energy had returned. Zeal for the glory of God, and the spiritual good of those most nearly connected to her, became her ruling motive.

Most readily did both Calanthe and Alypius aid her in her plans; and they gave a willing assent to her proposal that they should accompany her to Alexandria. Alypius' own desires led him strongly towards that city. Neither absence nor the great inward change which he had experienced had availed to obliterate the image of Medora from his heart. On the contrary, the more he had seen of other women, the more lovely did the young Egyptian maiden appear to him by comparison; and the more deeply and earnestly he felt the worth of his

own soul, and the value of the gospel, the more passionately did he desire that Medora should become a partaker of his heavenly hopes, and that he might be the instrument of bringing her into the way of salvation.

The discovery that Claudia was the sister of the object of his thoughts—a discovery which he did not make until he returned to Tagaste—revived all the impressions which he had tried to efface from his mind, and all the unacknowledged hopes which nothing had ever extinguished in his breast. He felt that in Medora all his hopes of earthly happiness were centred ; and he also felt that by her conversion to Christianity, and her deliverance from the power of her father, those hopes could alone be realized.

In Claudia he found a warm and sympathizing friend. She already loved him for his kindness to her in her days of grief, and almost of madness ; and since she had dwelt at Tagaste, she had learned to love him still more for Calanthe's sake. But when he returned from Milan, improved in spiritual and moral character, and when she knew that his heart was devoted to her dearly-beloved sister, her affections were strongly drawn out to him, and she already looked on him as a brother.

Now, at length, Alypius understood the strange look which had so often startled and perplexed him since the day that he first beheld Claudia. Though many years older than her sister, and though long years of sorrow had left their traces on her face, they were very similar in person. With health of body and peace of mind, the likeness to Medora had become much more perceptible ; and he now looked upon her as worthy

to be the sister of her fairer, and younger, and more lovely relative.

The return of Sophis from his mission was not expected for several weeks; and Marcella knew that when he did return he would be so much occupied with political affairs, that all domestic concerns would be troublesome and irksome to him. More especially she knew that anything connected with Claudia, whose name was forbidden to be even mentioned in his presence, would rouse all his former anger, and at such a time be doubly displeasing to him. She hoped eventually to be able to move his pity towards his once-loved daughter, by the story of all her sufferings, and privations, and bereavements; but she felt that this must be a work of time, and must only be undertaken with care and caution, and a due regard to the state of her husband's mind and temper, when first the long-forbidden name should be uttered to him.

All this Marcella laid before her daughter and Alypius; and then she declared her conviction that the most prudent plan that they could adopt would be for Claudia, her friend Calanthe, and Alypius to repair at once to Philæ, and make known to Medora and Orestes all that had occurred with regard to their sister. They would also then be enabled to ascertain the true feelings of Medora towards the religion of Jesus, since she had had time and opportunity to compare it with that so-called religion to which she had been devoted from her earliest childhood; and they would hear from herself whether she was satisfied to walk on still in the darkness of idolatry, or whether she was resolved to confess herself a disciple of Christ, or at least a sincere inquirer into the doctrines of the gospel.

The intentions of Sophis with regard to Medora, and the name and character of the man whom he designed to be her husband, were all detailed to Claudia by her mother; who expressed the greatest repugnance to the connection, and expressed a fervent hope that she might live to see her darling child a professed Christian, and united to one of the same faith; and who might be in all respects far more worthy of her than the free-thinking, and yet fanatical idolater, Muthis.

As Marcella thus declared her feelings and wishes, her eyes turned involuntarily on Alypius; and in his expressive, but now flushed countenance, she read a full participation in her own sentiments, and her own hopes. A smile was also playing on Claudia's lips, and a very intelligible glance was directed towards the young Roman, as she said:—

“I think we are agreed on that point, dear mother. My sweet sister must not be allowed to remain a worshipper of Isis. Since you have told us that her active mind has been directed to the search after Divine truth, I feel a sure conviction that she will be led to reject error, and to embrace with joy the only way of salvation. I yearn to see her dear face once more. She may be changed in the many long years that have passed away since we parted; but I should know her among a thousand maidens—no other could ever be to me like her!”

Tears rose to the eyes of Claudia as she thought of the sister she had so dearly loved, and whom she had not seen since her childhood. But soon a happy smile chased away her tears; and she continued:

“My young friend and protector, Alypius, has so fully and minutely described her, as he knew her a year ago, that even if

my memory were less faithful, I think I must recognise her anywhere. From his account she is not much altered—only matured and improved, and become what she always promised to be—as near perfection as human nature is capable of. Is it not so, Alypius?”

The young man smiled also, and looked slightly confused. But, quickly recovering himself, he replied :


“Medora’s form is a fitting shrine for the pure and holy and elevating Christian faith. When she has received the blessed truths contained in God’s word, and has learned to feel for the Redeemer that devotion which she has so long given to an imaginary deity, she will be almost an angel!”

“So be it!” said Marcella, and she looked approvingly at Alypius; who felt from that moment that he might depend on her, as well as on Claudia, to aid him in his suit with Medora, whenever the fitting time should arrive for him to press it.

As long as she remained a worshipper of the gods of Egypt, Alypius now felt, more strongly than ever, that he could never unite himself to Medora, even if no other obstacles existed. But if she were to become a Christian, he resolved to win her love, and secure her hand, in spite of all the opposition of Sophis, and all the jealousy and malice of Muthis. How this was to be effected was not very clear, even to his ardent spirit; but he was young and sanguine, and he was in love,—and obstacles only seemed to strengthen his resolution, and nerve him to courage and perseverance.



CHAPTER XVIII.

HE broad Nile was rising high as our travellers floated on its smooth surface in a well-appointed barge, that was bound for the city of Thebes.

The weather was warm and sultry ; but a large awning was spread over a portion of the deck which was appropriated to Claudia, Calanthe, and Alypius, and it afforded them a welcome shelter from the rays of the midday sun. But when the heat of the day subsided, and the evening breeze set in, the boatmen drew to the shore and landed, sometimes on the eastern, and sometimes on the western bank of the river, where they lighted fires and cooked their supper ; singing all the time some of their native melodies, that sounded sweetly in the distance.

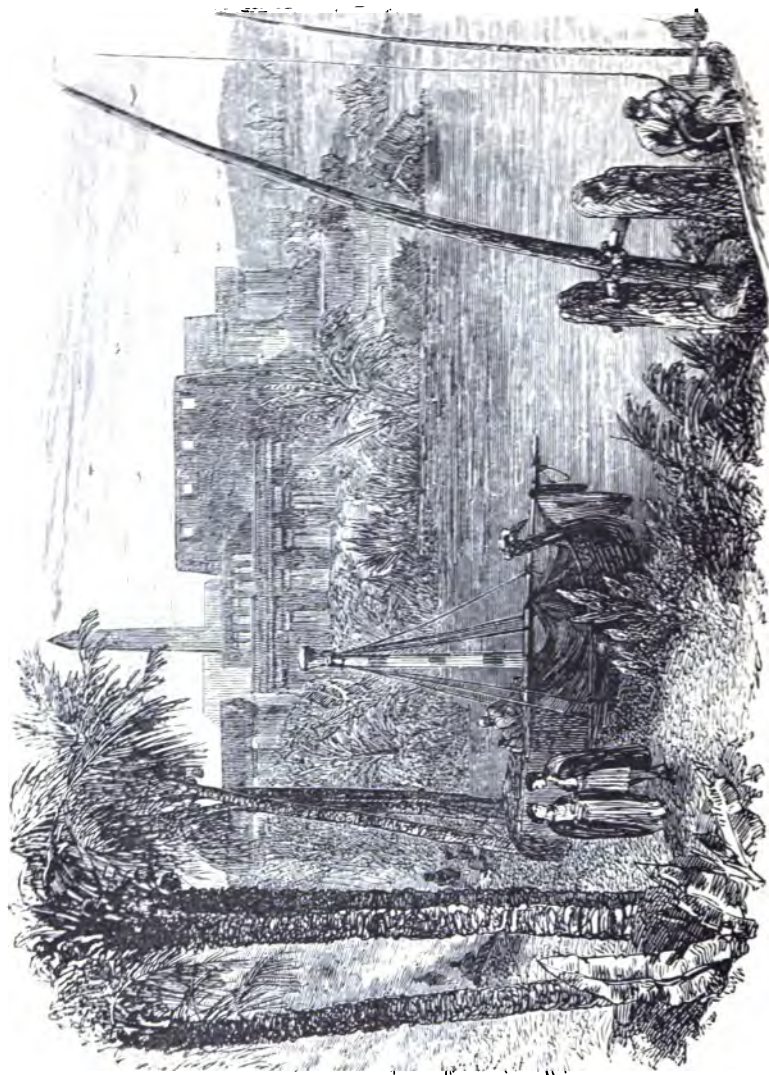
The travellers also frequently landed, and walked along the river bank, or bent their steps inland towards some Egyptian village, or some inviting grove of palms.

To Alypius the scenery of the Nile was a novelty ; and he was much interested in observing the manners and customs of the native villagers, which were very different from any he had been accustomed to see. The various ingenious contrivances for distributing the precious waters of the sacred river over all the neighbouring fields attracted his attention—the wide canals that conveyed the water across the whole width of the fertile valley from the river's brink even to the foot of the rocky mountains, by which the valley is shut in—the tiny channels

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THE BANKS OF THE NILE.—PAGE 156.

which were cut through every little plot of ground, and from which the fertilizing fluid was drawn and cast over the earth by means of the ancient pole and bucket; still used under the name of the *shadoof*—were new and curious to him.

The Nilometers, by which the elevation of the river was measured, were also objects of curiosity to his inquiring mind; and he marked how the appointed watchmen at these machines observed the rising of the waters at the period of the annual inundation, and gave notice, by regular signals, of the exact time at which the canals were to be opened.

Great was the interest felt by all the inhabitants of the valley in this natural phenomenon, the degree of which each year they attributed to the favour or the displeasure of their gods; and many were the votive offerings of fruit and flowers that were daily cast into the rising flood, to propitiate the presiding deity, and secure to themselves all the advantages of a plentiful inundation.

One morning Claudia and Alypius were on the deck of the vessel before sunrise, in the hope of enjoying the pure fresh air before the great heat should compel them to retire beneath the awning. They looked towards the east, across the broad river that lay in shadow and calm repose; and they watched the first faint streak of light that appeared in the horizon, which was broken by rocky and precipitous hills, between whose peaks the crimson light shone brightly. Higher it rose, until it formed an arch of splendour towering up to the heavens, with streaks of gold and red shooting up across it. The stars—the glorious stars of an eastern night—faded and died away as the light of day rose higher into the sky, and changed it from a deep purple

to a pure cerulean blue. Then a rose-coloured glow was cast on the western hills, and streaks of silver light played on the broad expanse of water. Suddenly the sun himself appeared, rushing up from his eastern bed, and filling earth and heaven with his flashing rays of light, and heat, and life.

In an instant a shout was raised all along the shore, which now the travellers observed to be crowded with persons standing close to the water's edge. The Nile had attained the hoped-for height—it was nearly level with the thickly peopled bank; and the watchmen had given the appointed signal, at the moment when the light of day had shown the success of the prayers and the gifts that had been offered to the great Osiris : for throughout Egypt, as in most other parts of the world, many pagan rites and superstitions yet held their ground even where a nominal Christianity was professed. The sounds of the tambourine and pipe, of the lute and the guitar, mingled with the voices of the multitude ; and rose up in the praise of that favourite god of the Egyptians, of whose creative powers the river Nile was considered a sacred emblem.

Instantly the labourers—who were stationed ready at the proper spots—commenced their task of digging through the banks of earth that closed the openings of the canals, and drawing aside the wooden dams that shut the entrances of the smaller sluices. Quickly the waters flowed through ; and soon the dry and thirsty land adjoining the river assumed the appearance of a large lake, crossed by many embankments, and dotted with curious little dwellings built on piles, and now only accessible by means of boats.

Thus would these favoured fields be allowed to remain for

many weeks—receiving unbounded fertility from the wide-spread waters ; until towards the end of autumn they would again subside, and retire within their natural limits, and thus allow the husbandmen to resume their light labours, and sow their seed on the richly manured land.

Claudia had witnessed all these customs of her native land many times before ; and she could look back to the period when she shared in the superstitions and the idolatrous observances of her countrymen. Now she could look up to the God of creation, and thank *him* for all his blessings, both temporal and spiritual ; and fervently did she now pray to him to free her beloved sister, and all who were united to her by the ties of kindred or affection, from the fearful and degrading bonds of paganism.

Many were the conversations which she held with Alypius on this subject—so near to both their hearts. And many also were their plans for the future, and their discussions as to the best method of convincing Medora of the utter fallacy of her present religious belief, and of the peace and joy she would find in the reception of Christian truth.

Claudia's mind dwelt much likewise on the time when she had lived on the banks of the Nile, with her husband and her little Cleon. She pointed out to Alypius the village near which she had resided in her brief years of happiness ; and where her beloved husband had died, and left her poor and desolate.

Higher up the river, the boat was moored one evening near a spot which seemed to bring to Claudia's mind memories almost as sad as the place where she had once found a happy home.

It was on the eastern side of the Nile; and an opening in the mountain-chain gave an extensive view of the desert beyond.

"It was there," she said, pointing to the receding plain, "that I sought a refuge with my Christian friend. It was in a hut at the foot of those hills that we resided in peace for several years; during which persecution and cruelty were the portion of all who were known to be Christians. But we found that it was not only from our Roman governors we had to fear cruelty and oppression. The Arabs, who often in their wanderings encamp on yonder plain, were more to be dreaded than we were at all aware of: and, as I told to you at Alexandria, they brought ruin, and despair, and death, upon our little household. Far away beyond those mountains they bore my child: he was seen in their cruel grasp, he was heard imploring their pity in vain! Doubtless he soon perished from grief and hardship; or, if he still lives, he lives a slave to the wild and wandering sons of the desert."

"Would it comfort you to go once more and visit the scene of so much peace and of so much misery?" inquired Alypius.

"I have longed for years to behold that spot once more," replied Claudia. "When I left it, I believe I scarcely knew where I went, or what had befallen me. My heart was almost broken, and my mind was filled with darkness. Now I think I could bear to look on the place again, and recall all that I there enjoyed and suffered. Some memorial I would also bring away. I remember that the cottage was in ruins when I returned to it, and part of it was burnt; near which part my

poor friend lay murdered and bleeding. I would see the place again, Alypius."

Claudia spoke very rapidly ; and her eyes had something of that painful expression which Alypius had so often seen during the early period of his acquaintance with her. He regretted that he had suggested a visit to the ruined dwelling ; but it was now too late to draw back. Claudia was bent on the expedition ; and he could only endeavour to calm her mind, and soothe her excitement—as she walked rapidly towards the hills—by leading her to reflect on her lost Cleon's early faith and piety, and on the blessed hope of rejoining him and her Christian husband in a world where there would be no sorrows and no partings.

His efforts were successful ; and when they reached the spot Claudia's features wore a sad, but tranquil expression ; and she gazed on the ruins of her former home with tearful eyes, in which no wildness was perceptible.

The ruined hut was situated in a little enclosure which had once been cultivated ; but the fence was broken, and the garden was a wilderness. Over the rough stones and the fallen beams of half-burnt wood that lay strewn on the ground, wild plants had climbed, and clothed the wreck with grace and beauty. The marauders had carried away every portable article of use or value that they could find ; and nothing was visible but some portions of broken furniture, nearly buried among grass and weeds.

Claudia roamed among the ruins ; she stopped and gazed at each remnant of remembered articles, and then passed on in silent grief.

Presently she paused, and moved aside a portion of a broken wooden chest, that lay, half-concealed, among the creeping

plants. A cry of glad surprise escaped her lips ; and, snatching up something from the ground, she pressed it to her heart, while tears fell copiously from her eyes.

“See,” she exclaimed, turning to Alypius, and a smile played on her quivering lips as she showed him an armlet of gold, curiously engraved, and set with polished stones. “See, Alypius, I have indeed found a treasure! My darling boy wore this ornament, and another like it, the day that I lost him. How often have I reproached myself for my foolish vanity in adorning him with these last remains of my former wealth and prosperity. These bracelets were a gift from my father, who had them made by a very ingenious artist, according to his own design ; and, even in my greatest poverty, I could never make up my mind to part with them. But I have often feared it was these glittering trinkets that led the Arabs to our poor dwelling. My Cleon had often gone to their camp in the plain ; and, doubtless, some of the tribe had cast greedy and longing eyes on his golden ornaments. I used to love to see them encircling his arms. Now this bracelet is all that remains to me of him ; and I will wear it for his sake.”

As she said this, Claudia pressed the beautifully wrought and yielding band of gold round her wrist, and gazed at it with fond regret.

“It must have fallen from his arm as they bore him away, and have lain ever since unobserved,” she continued. “Oh, where is its fellow now? And where is he who wore them?”

“God knoweth,” replied Alypius, solemnly. “The God of his believing parents knows where your boy is now ; and he is

in his keeping, whether on earth or in heaven. I have a strong hope that he is still living, and may yet be restored to you ; for why should the Arabs take his life ? Nothing is impossible with God ; and in his own good time he may see fit to hear your prayers, and give you your heart's desire."

"I dare hardly hope it," said Claudia sadly ; "and yet, when I think of the abounding mercy of the Lord in leading me out of idolatry, and giving me grace to believe in Jesus Christ as my Saviour, I feel that there is nothing indeed too great or wonderful to ask of him—nothing too merciful to hope and to expect from him."

The eye of Claudia was brighter, and her step was firmer and more elastic, as she walked back with Alypius to the river side ; and her whole manner was more cheerful. She spoke with greater hope for the future as regarded herself ; and she also encouraged her young companion to look forward with more confidence than he had yet ventured to entertain, to Medora's conversion, and her sympathy in his feelings.


It was agreed between them that nothing should be said to Medora concerning the attachment with which she had inspired Alypius, until he could be assured that she would abandon her long-cherished errors, and embrace the truth ; for he was still firmly resolved that if his hopes for such a blessed change were disappointed, he would hide his love for her in his own breast, and never again trust himself in her dangerous presence.

With thoughts, and conversations, and plans such as these, Calanthe, Claudia, and Alypius whiled away the time of their voyage. The barge was heavily laden ; and the boatmen had frequently to put forth all their strength in order to stem the

current, especially when the wind was contrary. But when the breeze blew from the north, they spread their coloured sails, and accompanied their lightened labour by singing in chorus to the measured stroke of their oars.



CHAPTER XIX.

T Thebes—the ancient *No*, or *No-Amun*—the barge ended its voyage: and our travellers were obliged to remain for a few days, until another vessel was ready to proceed up the Nile as far as a village near the first cataract.

This period of delay, which would otherwise have proved very irksome to both Claudia and Alypius, was fully occupied in visiting the marvellous buildings which adorned the city and its neighbourhood. The great temple of Karnak—the avenue of colossal sphynxes—the pillars and obeliaks of marble and granite—that rose on every side, were subjects of wonder and amazement to Alypius. Already the greater part of these magnificent works of art were regarded as relics of antiquity; and many of them—especially the greater temples and the long ranges of sepulchres hewn in the rocks that bounded the city on both sides of the river—had ceased to be used for their original purposes. But many of the Egyptian race and religion still dwelt in the “City of a Hundred Gates;” and still the worship of the gods of Egypt was carried on in the city which had ever been considered sacred to them, and which contained the sepulchres of the kings of the ancient dynasties.

These stupendous excavations Alypius visited; partly to examine the carving and painting with which the extensive galleries, and passages, and lofty chambers were decorated,

and partly to acquire information respecting the fraternities of various sects and various religions who, he was informed, had established themselves in these deserted sepulchres, and there dwelt in solitude and austerity apart from all the busy cares of life.

As no females were ever permitted to enter these monastic precincts, Calanthe and Claudia remained on the east side of the river, and spent some hours in the old temple in serious meditation and the prayerful study of a portion of God's word. And thus did they hallow this great seat of idolatry by invoking the presence of Him before whom at last all idols shall for ever be abolished.

Alypius was meanwhile rowed across the river in a small boat, and landed in the western part of the extensive city, which formerly spread to the width of six miles.

He passed through many streets, both ancient and modern, and admired many fine and richly ornamented structures; but he did not pause to examine them, for his curiosity drew him on towards the celebrated "Tombs of the Kings."

On emerging from the city, Alypius found himself at the foot of the range of steep limestone rocks, the face of which was broken into many fantastic forms; with galleries—partly natural and partly artificial—running in various directions.

He climbed by a circuitous path to a long terrace, which had evidently been enlarged and improved by the hand of man, and formed a broad esplanade, from which a magnificent view of the whole of the sacred city was obtained. Here must the gorgeous processions, that in the days of old accompanied the remains of a deceased monarch to his royal sepulchre, have

paused to marshal themselves in order before entering the sacred domains of Amenti. And here must have assembled the friends and relatives of the kings, and of others whose bodies were admitted into these spacious tombs, when they paid their frequent visits to the sepulchres, which were made places of social meeting and entertainment.

Now all such assemblies had ceased in these deserted tombs. The owl and the bat, the lizard and the coney, already shared them as places of habitation with the Jewish ascetic or the Christian hermit.

Even as early as the first century of the Christian era we are told of a sect of Jews who "forsook their wealth, and families, and friends, and sought for the solitude of tombs or caves in the mountains," that they might devote themselves to holy contemplation, and attain to a calm and quiet frame of mind.

In the two following centuries, the Christian faith spread rapidly in Africa; and from Alexandria the sound of the gospel extended all along the valley of the Nile, and even as far as into Nubia. In these early ages the disciples of Christ were subjected to many and fierce persecutions; for the Romans, who then held unquestioned the mastery of Egypt, and of the whole of Northern Africa, sought to crush and exterminate the new faith by cruelty and slaughter.

Then did the little scattered flock flee into dens and caves of the earth to preserve their lives, and their most holy faith, from the fire and the sword of the enemy. And then did those who were so happy as to possess copies of the Holy Scriptures bear away their treasured manuscripts, and hide

them in some secluded spot where they and their brethren could meet unseen, and listen to the precious word of life.

The birth of monasticism, the spirit of which had already appeared, brought fresh inhabitants to the deserts of Africa and the mountain ranges of Egypt. Towards the close of the fourth century, as we have already mentioned, Anthony instituted a regular order of monks. He sold his land, and went to live among the tombs; and soon his example was followed by many who sought either temporal security or spiritual peace in seclusion.

We have seen how the account of the self-sacrifice of Anthony and his followers had fired the zeal, and aroused the emulation and the self-reproaches, of Augustine and his friend at Milan; and now Alypius earnestly desired to become acquainted with some of the devotees, and to discover whether the holiness of their hearts corresponded with the austerity of their outward lives.

He stood awhile on the platform which overlooked the city; and as he gazed on the grand prospect of rocky mountains and fertile plains, and the broad river bordered with majestic buildings, and all glowing beneath the rays of an unclouded sun, he thought how glorious would be this goodly land when the Sun of Righteousness should fully rise upon her, and disperse all the heathen darkness and cruel idolatry that still lurked in the fertile valley of the Nile.

As he stood thus musing, he was startled by the sound of a horn, which echoed among the caverns and ravines of the mountains. But, ere the sound died away, Alypius beheld the rocky paths, which had hitherto been silent and deserted,

suddenly peopled with gravely dressed men, who seemed to come forth from the bowels of the earth, and were all moving slowly towards the platform on which he was stationed.

He remained silent and motionless, and perhaps a little awe-stricken, at the sudden apparition of so many ghostly forms in this city of the dead. But soon he perceived that they were the very men whom he had come to see; and he hoped to be able to observe some of their customs.

Gradually they assembled on the platform; but some of them had to come from a considerable distance along narrow and circuitous paths, and through subterranean galleries; and it was long before all the fraternity had come from their lonely cells, and were gathered together in front of the royal tombs.

While they were thus assembling, Alypius was courteously addressed by one who appeared to be the head of the community, and who entered into conversation with him, while all the brethren stood silently around.

From this monk, or abbot, as we may perhaps call him, Alypius learned much of the mode of life of the community; and it must be confessed that much of the enthusiasm with which he, as well as Augustine, had been inspired when first they heard of a life devoted to religion, vanished away as he acquired a more accurate knowledge of the realities of such an existence.

Perhaps the different circumstances in which he was placed on these two occasions may have caused the difference in his feeling and opinions with regard to a monastic life, or the seclusion of a hermit. At Milan he was under the influence of disappointment and depression. His affections had been

blighted, his own conduct had been inconsistent and unsatisfactory, his faith was weak and wavering, and he was yearning to find some way of peace, some manner of life by which he could win God's favour, and recover his own self-esteem.

Now the world seemed brighter around him, and brighter far were his hopes in the world above. Some prospect of earthly happiness was accorded to him, and he knew that the happiness of eternity was secured to him by the sure promises of God to all true believers in his Son ; and a life of active usefulness in the church of Christ was open before him. Could he now regard the monastic life otherwise than as a useless and unprofitable sacrifice, and a shrinking from man's appointed lot of labour, and care, and trial ?

The abbot informed Alypius of the strict rules by which the daily lives of the brotherhood were governed. Their diet was extremely frugal, neither meat nor wine being permitted at any time. Their heads were closely shaven, after the manner of the Egyptian priests ; and they were forbidden to speak to a woman, or even to look upon one of the weaker sex.

Each colony, or *Laura*, as it was called, dwelt separately ; and each fraternity selected the largest and most convenient of the tombs or caves in which they resided for a place of meeting for worship. To this meeting they were called by the blast of a horn, which could be distinctly heard at a great distance ; and every brother was required instantly to cease from his occupation—whether he were engaged in prayer or in study, or whether he were employed in tilling his little garden, or in weaving mats and baskets to be sold at Thebes or Alexandria—and to proceed to the place of assembly without delay.

As soon as the abbot knew that the stranger was a Christian, he invited him to enter one of the wide corridors that opened on the platform, and to be present at their mid-day service. He led the way, and Alypius followed him through long passages dimly lighted, but glowing with rich colours—crimson, purple, black, and yellow, being the prevailing hues—in most fantastic designs and curious hieroglyphics.

Then they emerged again into the light of day, and passed along an open gallery, the side of which was elaborately painted, until they reached a wide doorway, richly carved with sacred emblems, and entered a splendid chamber—once the last resting-place of one of the Pharaohs, but now converted into a Christian temple by zealous but misguided men.

At the end of the apartment there still sat the massy figures of three Egyptian deities, looking towards the entrance with their solemn eyes. There they had sat for centuries, and there probably they remain to this present day to meet the gaze of curious travellers of the nineteenth century.

On each side of these images the tombs were cut in the living rock, which was smoothed, and plastered, and painted with suitable devices. The coffins were gone—probably they had been rifled by some wandering tribes for the sake of the gold and the jewels which were so frequently interred with the wealthy dead—and the remains had been cleared away by the monks with other dust and rubbish.

The service that was performed in this place of the dead was simple and impressive, at least it appeared so to Alypius. But he could not avoid being struck by the evident inattention of


the greater part of the brethren, and the want of reverence in their whole manner and deportment.

"This is not the service that the Lord requires," he said to himself, as he left the tomb. "This does not tend to his honour and glory, or the good of our fellow-creatures' souls or bodies. I will bear it all in mind, and tell Augustine how this new system works. We have been too much in favour of this so-called devotion." For shortly after their baptism Alypius and Augustine had united themselves into a sort of monastic brotherhood.

When he again saw his revered and beloved friend Augustine, he endeavoured to convince him that a life of religious seclusion was not necessarily a life of piety and usefulness. But his arguments and representations were unavailing; for we know that the great and good Bishop of Hippo did, in the latter years of his life, institute several monastic establishments, which, though leading to great evils, were so far useful in that early period of the church's history as schools and depositories of learning and religion, and from whence many men distinguished for piety were sent forth into the world.



CHAPTER XX.

HE vessel in which the travellers had engaged a passage as far as the village near the cataracts, was ready to proceed on her way the day after the visit of the young Roman to the Tombs of the Kings.

Pleasantly they were borne up the stream, which at times became very narrow, from the near approach of the rocky boundaries ; a mere strip of earth being left on the river side to be cultivated by the teeming population. At other spots the bed of the great Nile widened, until it looked like a large lake, as smooth and shining as a mirror, and everywhere bordered with villages, and groves, and fertile fields.

As they advanced towards the sacred island the vegetation on the river banks bore evident signs of a more southern climate. Not only were the meadows more luxuriantly fertile than those in Lower Egypt, but the wild creeping plants that clothed the rocks, and hung in garlands from every crevice, had an almost tropical character ; and the flowers glowed with a richness of hue that Alypius had never beheld elsewhere. Claudia was amused and delighted at the admiration which her companion expressed of the scene around him, and she almost forgot her own abiding cares and anxieties in her sympathy with his pleasure and astonishment at what was so entirely new to him.

The efforts of the sturdy boatmen were redoubled as the bed

of the stream became narrower, and the force of the waters consequently increased. By-and-by the roar of the still distant cataracts caught their ears, and they knew that they must prepare for the struggle and the danger which always attended the passage of a boat through the craggy rocks, and the foaming, dashing water.

But ere they entered on the expected conflict the boatmen drew to the land, and requested all the passengers to go on shore, as the ascent of the cataracts was not to be attempted by ladies, or indeed by any one who could not depend on his own strength of muscle and steadiness of nerve ; neither, indeed, could the vessel in which they then were be taken up the falls.

The sound of the cataracts had at first been softened by distance, and had a sweet and soothing effect ; but as the boat had advanced towards the rocky elevations it had become louder and grander, until the roar equalled that of prolonged thunder, and struck awe into the breasts of some of the passengers.

Most of the travellers, both male and female, were requested to proceed by land to the summit of the acclivity, and to a neighbouring spot on the river side, where the crew would meet them and convey them to Philæ in the small light boat that was to carry the luggage up the falls. A rude kind of vehicle received the females, while the men of the party accompanied them on foot, as they prepared slowly to ascend the steep and rugged road that lead by a winding way over the elevated ridge, through a chasm in which the mighty river must once have forced its tumultuous course.

Alypius resolved to ascend the cataract in the boat with the greater part of the crew. A party of half-naked Arabs were

waiting with the boat that was to ascend the cataract. Claudia saw the wild, active men dash into the water, and wade and swim round the boat, ready to assist in the coming struggle.

She remarked that one of the party was the leader, or sheik ; and that he took the command not only of his own followers, but also of the Egyptian boatmen, with a look of stern authority that was evidently not to be disputed. He was a very striking looking man ; his bronzed and muscular frame was seen to advantage as he threw aside his rough burnouse, and, in the light clothing which he still retained, prepared to combat with the foaming waves with all the dignity of a monarch at the head of his army.

There was something in this Arab chief that attracted Claudia's attention in a peculiar manner. She involuntarily watched him, and a feeling akin to fear entered her breast as she observed the dark expression of his countenance, and the look of fierce determination with which he issued his orders.

As the rough carriage in which she was seated was leaving the shore, a boy came out of a hut at a little distance and rather timidly approached the sheik. Claudia could not hear the words which he addressed to him, nor would she have understood them if she had been nearer, for the boy spoke in Arabic. It was, however, easy to perceive that he was making an earnest request ; for his attitude was pleading, and his upturned face expressed both eager excitement and doubting fear.

The sheik hardly noticed him at first ; but as the boy urged his entreaty he gave a nod of assent, then took the light and graceful child by the arm and threw him into the water by the side of the already moving boat.

The boy's head struck one of the outstretched oars, and he would have sunk stunned to the bottom of the river, had not Alypius, who had seen the action of the rude Arab, leaned over the boat, caught the boy's arm, and quickly drawn him in. Claudia saw no more, for the carriage was already in motion, drawn by several oxen, which were led by men on foot ; and the river was soon concealed from her view.

As they proceeded over the acclivity, they again caught sight of the narrow boat as it stemmed the foaming current far below ; and Claudia and Calanthe watched the hardy crew as they strove to propel the little frail-looking vessel between the masses of rock that formed the cataract.

Sometimes almost all the boatmen sprang into the water to lighten the boat, and joined their Arab comrades in dragging it through some narrow channel, or even in lifting it over the rocks where there was not depth of water sufficient to float it.

Claudia's attention was divided between Alypius, the Arab chief, and the boy towards whom he had shown such violence. She could just distinguish them all, and observe their actions when the road ran near the edge of the cliff.

Alypius was provided with an oar, and he used it with strength and dexterity whenever the boat was in water sufficiently wide and deep to admit of rowing. Then the Arabs swam around the vessel, or leaped from rock to rock near the river's edge ; the deep, sonorous voice of their chief sounding clearly, even above the roar of the cataract, as he gave the word of command, and led the way through foam and rushing water, and over slippery crags, as if he could rule the elements as easily as he governed his half-naked followers.

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THE ARAB SHEIK DRAGGING THE BOY TO THE WATER.—PAGE 178.

The boy was in the boat by the side of Alypius, and Claudia saw that her young friend was endeavouring to converse with him ; but soon the sheik approached the boat as it grounded in a shallow spot, and taking the boy in his arms, he lifted him out and placed him on a rock over which the spray was dashing. It was a perilous position for one so young and so slightly formed ; and Claudia shuddered involuntarily as she fixed her eyes on the brave little fellow, and saw him breasting the dashing spray, and then leap into the current and swim against it manfully.

She need not have shuddered and closed her eyes as he sank beneath the waters,—she need not have gazed so fearfully, and dreaded lest the boy should not appear again on its surface ; for, child as he was, he had been inured to all bodily exercises, from stemming the torrents of the Nile to curbing a wild Arab courser in its flight across the desert. His brave young spirit delighted in all such trials of skill and energy,—he feared nothing but the sheik.

Gallantly the boy won his way up the stream, and gallantly the crew and the wild Arabs brought the boat through all opposing difficulties, until it floated in the smooth water above the cataract. The channel of the Nile was still hemmed in for some distance by the steep, precipitous rocks, and Claudia could watch their skill as the boatmen rowed on towards the appointed place of meeting. She could also see the Arabs swimming around the boat, and her eye still followed the active movements of the boy, whose light form seemed almost to float on the surface of the waters. He was clothed in a tight-fitting vest with short sleeves, and a skirt reaching to his knees, so that his

polished and well-formed limbs were exposed, and might have formed a model for a sculptor.

As the carriage descended towards the shore the boat drew to the bank ; and the Arabs also landed at a little distance, and busied themselves in shaking the water from their dripping limbs, and long, dishevelled locks. But the attention of the travellers was drawn from them by the striking scene which opened to their view as the carriage emerged from some rocks ; and which scene, though not new to all, could never be looked upon without fresh admiration.

The broken and rugged cliffs, which had hitherto confined the river within a narrow and tumultuous channel, now sank and receded on either side ; and the grand old Nile spread out into a wide and placid lake, gleaming in the sunshine, and forming a marked contrast to the troubled course which its waters were so soon to run.

In the centre of this seeming lake rose the sacred Isle of Philæ—Philæ, so appropriately called “The Beautiful” in all ages. A mysterious loveliness seemed to surround the hallowed spot ; and even Claudia, who had long ceased to feel any reverence for the deities enshrined in its noble temples, was yet strongly impressed with a sense of the spiritual beauty with which the lovely island appeared to be invested.

Alypius joined them as they alighted from the carriage, and he was enthusiastic in his admiration of the exquisite prospect, and not a little excited, also, at the thought of so soon beholding one of the inmates of the sacred spot. So much were both he and Claudia occupied with gazing at this Isle of Temples, and thinking of their meeting with Medora, that they forgot

the Arab boy in whom they had both felt an interest. It was now arranged between them that Calanthe, having accompanied them thus far, should now return, to await them at Thebes, as her presence might prove a source of difficulty on the island. Here, therefore, they parted for a time. Alypius and Claudia had resumed their places in the boat, and were leaving the shore to be rowed across to Philæ, when a shout of farewell from the Arabs to the Egyptian boatmen caused them to look back. There stood the chief at the head of his men, looking like so many finely-executed statues of bronze; and by the side of the sheik the slender boy, of fairer skin and more delicate proportions than the other followers of the Arab chief. His eyes were fixed on Claudia with a look of wonder and admiration; and he remained on the spot gazing at her, until the sheik grasped his shoulder with his powerful hand and drew him away.

No wonder that the boy was struck by the unfamiliar sight of an Egyptian lady; no wonder that the sad sweetness of her countenance went to his young heart, which was inured to harshness and to neglect, and on which a look or a tone of sympathy but seldom fell.

"That boy has either a hard-hearted father or a cruel master in the Arab sheik," said Alypius, as they floated over the smooth water towards the landing-place of the island.

"I saw you speaking to him, Alypius," replied his companion. "Did he not tell you in what relation he stood to the cruel sheik, who seemed so regardless of his safety?"

"He spoke in a mixture of Arabic and Egyptian, which I could not understand; but I think he called the sheik 'father.'

No doubt his mother is some captive taken from a gentler and fairer race, for the child is not like a pure Arab. I hope his other parent treats him more kindly than that gigantic son of Ishmael appears to do."

As Alypius said these words the boat was brought to the foot of the broad steps cut in the rock that formed a landing-place to the island; and he sprang eagerly from the boat, and then assisted Claudia to land.

With every step, as they ascended to the upper part of the island, Alypius saw more to admire in the singular little spot, which is not more than about one hundred English acres in extent, and which formerly contained more magnificent temples than almost any city of ancient Egypt. Indeed, the whole island was covered nearly to the water's edge with sacred buildings,—either gorgeous shrines for the chief divinities of Egyptian mythology, or colleges and dwellings for the priests and priestesses, and for those students of either sex who desired to be initiated into so much of the holy mysteries of religion as might be vouchsafed to them.

Even at the early period to which our story belongs, the greater part of the temples were regarded as monuments of antiquity, and wonders of ancient skill in architecture. But they were then almost as perfect as when the builders first left them; for in a country like Upper Egypt, where rain so seldom falls, all buildings remain in a wonderful state of preservation. The frescoes in the interior of the temples are yet, in many places, not affected by moisture; and even the paintings on the external walls may be seen by modern travellers in all their original freshness of form and colouring.

Alypius would have been more impressed by the grandeur and beauty of all that met his eyes as he reached the first terrace to which the rocky staircase led him and his companion, had not all his thoughts and feelings been so much absorbed by one far more interesting object. He passed the sculptured hieroglyphics, with which all the rocks around the landing-place were profusely covered, with little notice ; but his attention was irresistibly attracted by the colossal figure of the god Nilus, placed on a huge block of stone, and overlooking the terrace. The image was in a sitting posture, and held in each hand a capacious jar, from which flowed streams of water that ran down into the river, as an emblem of the inundation, over which the deity was supposed to preside. An enormous serpent was coiled round his rocky throne, and above his head were perched the sacred hawk and vulture, which occur so frequently in Egyptian hieroglyphics.

A winding path led up to the summit of the cliffs, and there a solid wall seemed to forbid the further advance of the travellers. But they soon came to a massy gateway, through which they were admitted into the interior of the holy island.


A dreamy, mysterious silence pervaded the whole place. It seemed like a city of the dead ; and this impression was scarcely lessened by the solemn priestly forms that were seen here and there, gliding with noiseless steps through lofty arches or along gloomy corridors.

Claudia had no need of the guidance of the appointed guardian of the sacred enclosure. She had visited the island in her younger days, and every part of it was strongly impressed upon her memory. She led Alypius through lines of

sacerdotal buildings and courts of gorgeous temples ; but she walked along in silence, for her mind was busy with many sad and many pleasant memories of the past, and also many plans for the future ; and her companion was in no mood to disturb her meditations.



CHAPTER XXI.

RE long our travellers reached the portal of the building where Arsinœ, the sister of Sophis, presided as a sort of abbess over a community of priestesses, and other female assistants in the service of Isis; and where also the daughters of some of the Egyptian aristocracy, who still adhered to the ancient national religion, were sent to be educated.

Like all the other buildings of Philæ, this college was highly ornamented, and very imposing in its outward aspect. An attendant of grave and solemn mien led Claudia and Alypius through the richly-carved entrance, and along painted corridors, towards the private apartments of the abbess; but the pictured walls, with all their strange devices, and the quaint statues that filled every niche and corner, were entirely lost upon them.

Was it a disappointment, or was it a relief, when they reached Arsinœ's apartment, to be told that she and her niece were engaged in the great temple of Osiris, where a solemn service was being celebrated, and where the priest, Orestes, was officiating?

Probably it was a mixed feeling, in which relief was predominant; for Claudia was greatly agitated at the idea of meeting the sister whom she had so dearly loved, and who would now probably not even recognise her; and Alypius felt hardly less emotion when he thought of again beholding the lovely Egyp-

tian maiden ; and both were glad of a little time to collect their thoughts, and prepare for the meeting.

One of the sisterhood now entered the apartment, and proposed to the strangers that they should repair with her to the temple. She spoke with reverential pride of the grand ceremony which was just about to commence ; as she never contemplated the possibility of any persons coming to Philæ, and seeking the abode of the pious Arsinœe, who did not sympathize with the abbess in her religious creed, and were not prepared to assist in the worship of the gods to whom the whole island was dedicated.

Alypius eagerly accepted the invitation. He was desirous to witness the ceremonies of Egyptian worship, and he was still more desirous to have an opportunity of beholding Medora, unknown and unseen by her.

Claudia would have preferred waiting her sister's return to the college, for she shrank from seeing Medora actually engaged in the worship of those false gods whom she had herself renounced ; but as she could assign no reason to the young novice for remaining alone, she accompanied her and Alypius. Through long porticoes, and cool, dimly-lighted passages, where the glowing sunbeams could not enter, they passed on, until they entered the open court in front of the grand temple of Osiris.

It was a noble building, with lofty walls adorned with pillars, and galleries, and stately entrances, and with many small chapels or oratories attached to it. The court was surrounded by a colonnade, and from thence were passages that led to shrines and chambers innumerable. Flights of winding steps

ascended to the towering propylæ that crowned the building, or to small terraces overlooking similar courts; while other steps descended to the water's edge, and gave a private means of egress and ingress to the priests, when any of their mysterious duties led them to desire a secret departure from the island. It was a strange and a very solemn-looking place; and Alypius's heart beat fast as their guide led him and Claudia into the interior.

Altars and obelisks covered with inscriptions were all around; but in the centre of the area was placed the grand altar dedicated to Osiris, and by the side of this altar stood a consecrated bull, as a living emblem of the great god. Calm and dignified looked the sacred animal, while one of the priests, whom Claudia and Alypius immediately recognised as Orestes, offered him incense, and others of the sacerdotal order stood around.

The priests of every degree were gorgeously attired: some of them wore the hawk's-head mask, while others were adorned with various and equally grotesque head-dresses, and had their hair arranged in the stiff curls which were an important part of the ancient Egyptian costume.

When Claudia and Alypius entered the sacred precincts all the priests were chanting a solemn liturgy, the words of which were quite unintelligible to the latter, and he was much struck by the effect of so many sonorous voices blending together in harmony. But Claudia understood the language, and every word struck painfully on her ear and on her heart; for the praise of Osiris was the subject of the chant; and to him and to Isis worship was paid, and supplications were addressed, as to deities who had power to save and to bless their votaries.

Wreaths and garlands of bright and fragrant flowers were then laid on the altar as votive offerings, and the sacred bull was also profusely decorated with the same lovely ornaments.

Hitherto Claudia and Alypius had looked in vain among the crowd of worshipping spectators for the form they desired to see ; but while the bull was being adorned, and the offerings were being placed on the altar, a sound of music was heard, and a band of maidens entered the area, preceded by the venerable Arsinöe. The young priestesses were all radiant with flowers, which were twined around their heads, hung in garlands from their shoulders, and were borne aloft in their hands.

Fairest and most graceful of the lovely group, Medora advanced across the polished marble floor. Her eyes were raised towards heaven, and the light that shone in them was too pure and intellectual, we might almost say too spiritual, to have been kindled by gross superstition and idolatrous devotion.

In an instant Claudia distinguished her, and her whole frame trembled with emotion as she caught the arm of Alypius, and whispered in an agitated voice—

“ I see her—I know her ! But, oh, Alypius, do I indeed behold her thus ? Can her spirit be enthralled by idol-worship ? Can that holy expression be inspired by adoration of imaginary gods ? I could weep tears of blood at the sight ! I could die to rescue her and my brother from the degrading bonds in which they are held ! ”

“ May the Lord give us the ability to win her—to win them both, to the true God ! ” whispered Alypius, in reply. “ I fear,” he added, with a sigh, “ that Medora’s return to this stronghold of superstition and idolatry has been the means of effecting

what your father so greatly desired, and has banished from his mind all the impressions in favour of Christianity which had been made upon it by the instructions of Marcella, and the opportunity of witnessing the simple mode of Christian worship, and hearing the blessed doctrines of the Gospel. Would to God she could enjoy the holy conversation, and mark the holy example, of my friend Augustine, and of my mother !”

“Alypius, the Lord will find the means for our beloved Medora’s conversion. Surely he will hear our prayers for her ; and all our hopes will be fulfilled.”

The elevated assurance of Claudia’s look and tone as she said these words reminded Alypius of the faith and the confidence of Monica with regard to her son, and it inspired him with a like assured hope. He looked at Medora with less of sadness and depression, and he felt nerved to meet her with more cheerfulness and composure than he had feared he could command.

The time for making this effort had not, however, yet arrived. The ceremonies were not completed, and Alypius and Claudia stood silently gazing at Medora, whose eyes never wandered, but remained uplifted until she and her companions reached a splendidly decorated altar, placed in a chapel that was only separated from the grand area of the temple by slender columns of marble. There Arsinœ left the youthful band, and joined the group of worshippers and spectators.

At the end of this chapel, and facing the marble pillars, stood three images of the mysterious triad of gods who were specially worshipped at Philæ, and who bore so strange a legendary form of Egyptian Trinity. This triad consisted of Osiris and Isis, and their partly inferior son, Horus.

The figure of Osiris was adorned with the feathered cap, in which he was always represented as the judge of the dead in the regions of Amenti; which office he held after his death, his burial at Philæ, and his subsequent resurrection and departure to the realms above. He was clothed in pure white garments, and held in his crossed hands the shepherd's crook and the flagellum, or emblem of chastisement. Thus he presided over the dead, who were presented to him by his son Horus. Their actions were then weighed in the balance of truth: the souls of the good returned to dwell with Osiris, and those of the evil were condemned to pass into bodies of swine, and other unclean animals, until their sins had been expiated and purged away; after which another life of probation was permitted to them.

By the side of the great Osiris sat his sister and wife, Isis, wearing a robe of many colours. She was regarded as the emblem of fertility, and has been considered identified with Ceres.

Horus, or Anubis, stood besides his divine parents, wearing a hawk's-head mask, and other insignia denoting his office as superintendent of the passage of souls from this life to a future state. He also presided over tombs.

All these divinities were adored throughout the land of Egypt; except where Christianity had encroached upon the old idolatries, as was the case in large cities like Alexandria, or in such regions as the Thebaid, where the monastic system had drawn together numerous Christian communities. In Upper Egypt the false gods still held sway. The isle of Philæ was peculiarly dedicated to them, and was, in very early times, considered so sacred, that no persons were allowed to enter it with-

out a special permission, except priests and priestesses, or those whose lives were in some way dedicated to the service of the gods.

Osiris must not be looked upon as the Egyptian idea of *deity in unity*, but only as an avatar, or human shrine of the spirit of the "king of the gods," as he was called, in whom the priests and the more enlightened classes believed. The lower orders worshipped his attributes, or manifestations of creative power and divine goodness, as separate deities.

These attributes were represented in various and very unworthy forms; but which symbolized to the initiated some important mysteries and sacred truths, which were hidden from the unlearned. To them the *symbol* itself became the object of worship; and hence the idolatrous reverence paid to animals, and even to reptiles, that had once been looked upon merely as emblems of any divine qualities.

The divinity, properly so called, was never represented in the Egyptian temples. Osiris personified the attribute of his goodness; Pthah was his creative power; Neph was the Spirit of God; and there were innumerable other attributes and ideas connected with God which were all deified, and all called by so many different names as to render the Egyptian theology extremely puzzling. Osiris was known by countless appellations, and Isis was called "the goddess with ten thousand names."

As judge of the dead, and in his mysterious character as an avatar, or impersonation of the One God, Osiris held a higher rank than any of the other deities of Egypt; and the most solemn oath known in the Thebaid was to swear "by Osiris, who lies buried at Philæ."

This deity, as we have observed, held a very exalted position; for he was superior to all the other eight secondary gods. He was said to be "full of goodness and truth." He appeared on earth to benefit mankind; and, after fulfilling his mission, he fell a sacrifice to the malice of Typho, the evil principle. But Typho was at length overcome by him; for after leaving this world he "*rose again to a new life*," and became the judge of mankind in a future state, and was invested with divine power.

Such was the religion of ancient Egypt—such was, at least, its great outline; and we cannot contemplate it without a feeling of wonder at the many points of resemblance between that outline and the grand fundamental doctrines of our own most blessed faith. Whence those strange coincidences arose it is now impossible to say; but they are very striking, and they go far to prove that a pure-minded and enlightened Egyptian might have been very far from the degraded idolater that we are apt to consider every believer in their ancient theology to have been. There were rays of light penetrating the thick darkness of heathenism,—there were flashes of truth breaking through the dense clouds of error that enshrouded this singular people; and many of them may have been seeking God, "if haply they might feel after him and find him."

Medora was one of these. She had worshipped God, as the god of goodness and truth, under the form of Osiris; and she had adored him as the god of her native land, and the bestower of all national blessings, in the person of Isis. We do not say that she always looked through the sign to the thing signified,—we do not say that she paid no worship to Osiris and Isis, and the other deities of her nation, in their own persons and as their

own right ; but her mind was elevated far above all gross superstition, and her conceptions of God in his essence and in his Divine character were far more pure and elevated than that of the greater part of her fellow-worshippers.

Her spirit was therefore better prepared for the reception of Divine truth, and her heart was more open to a conviction of the beauty of Christianity, than if she had been devoted to idolatry in its lower aspect. In much that she had heard of the religion of the Scriptures her reason and her feelings had sympathized ; and she had also imagined that much of her mother's new creed might be derived from the same source as her own, and might be received without a rejection of all her long-cherished objects of faith and reverence.

Since Medora's return to Philæ she had reflected much on these subjects, and had endeavoured to extract the germ of spiritual truth from the mass of error by which she found it was surrounded. Her mind was greatly exercised and perplexed ; and neither from her pious and devoted aunt, nor from her more intellectual, but equalled bigoted brother, could she derive any true comfort or any satisfactory explanation.


The moment she made any, even the slightest, allusion to the doctrines of Christianity, which were then so frequently discussed by all ranks in Egypt, she met with the most decided discouragement, and heard the new sect reviled as low-minded fanatics. This did not, however, check her own thoughts and her own comparisons between the rival religions. The more she reflected, the more she found her heart inclining towards the doctrines which had led so many Christians to endure

agony and death, rather than deny Him who had redeemed them, and in whom they trusted.

She could not profess herself a believer in Christ as her God and Saviour, for to that point of faith she had not attained ; neither was she yet prepared to renounce all her long-cherished objects of reverence, and to lay aside all the superstitious feelings and practices to which she had been accustomed from her earliest childhood. So she continued to pay reverence to her favourite deities ; and she tried to realize a spiritual frame of mind while she joined in the worship of idols.



CHAPTER XXII.

ILENT and unobserved stood Claudia and Alypius while the sacred ceremonies were proceeding; for the crowd of worshippers among whom they were placed were too much occupied to notice the strangers, or to perceive that they did not join in the prayers and invocations to the great divinities of the place.

A chant was sung by the officiating maidens in the chapel in honour of Isis, and her statue was decorated with the garlands which they took from their own shoulders to twine around her image. Then they knelt before her, and supplicated her blessing; after which incense was burned on the altar, the officiating priests and maidens came forth from the perfumed cloud—and the service was over.

Arsinoë had been standing at no great distance from Claudia and Alypius; but she had not perceived her niece, nor would she have recognised her even if their eyes had met. But she was herself very little altered. The years which had been to Claudia years of trial and grief, had passed calmly over the head of the abbess, and had left her brow as serene and unclouded as when last her elder niece had seen her.

She advanced to meet Medora as she left her young companions, and approached the group of spectators. The crowd had begun to disperse, and Claudia and Alypius felt that they

might be observed. They drew back, and would have retired from the temple, for they did not wish to meet Medora in such a spot; but her eyes fell on the face of Alypius, and in an instant her features were suffused with a crimson glow.

Quickly she turned her eyes aside, and then they met those of Claudia, which were riveted on her with a yearning gaze that instantly recalled feelings and memories of the past to Medora's heart, and for a moment seemed to chain her to the spot on which she stood.

Her aunt looked at her in blank surprise, for she could perceive no cause for her agitation. But in a moment Medora sprang forward. Unconscious of the sacred place in which she was, and of the observation of the bystanders and the severe-looking priestesses, she threw herself into Claudia's arms, exclaiming,—

“O my sister—my beloved Claudia! Do I indeed behold you again? And may I welcome you back, not only to the hearts of all your sorrowing family, but also to the temple and the worship of the gods? And our friend Alypius also, has he become a convert to our ancient religion? Welcome! welcome to you both!”

Medora's conscience smote her as she uttered these words hastily, and in an agitated tone; for she knew, at least she suspected, that it would be no matter of sincere congratulation if Claudia had indeed forsaken the religion of her husband, and returned to that of her fathers; or if Alypius had, as she supposed, exchanged one form of heathenism for another. But she still clung to her own old associations, and her old objects of worship; and she could not repress a feeling of joy, almost of

triumph, when she beheld two individuals so deeply interesting to her, apparently sharing her adoration of the divinities of Egypt.

This feeling was, however, very short-lived ; she soon learned from their manner that she could claim no sympathy from her sister and her friend ; and she turned her attention to other subjects relative to Claudia's past life, and her reappearance.

Arsinoë had looked on in surprise at the unexpected recognition. She now came forward and greeted her niece ; but with a hesitation of manner that showed plainly she still retained her displeasure at that act of Claudia's which had separated her from her family. Nevertheless, she invited her and Alypius to accompany her to her dwelling, and intimated that the sacred edifice they were standing in was not a place for domestic and personal discussions ; adding that the priests, who still lingered in the temple, might not be pleased if they even suspected that any one had entered the shrine for other purposes than those of worship.

The abbess looked serious and anxious ; and both Claudia and Alypius felt that they had been guilty of an act of great imprudence in setting foot in a place so sacred, and having remained so long as to subject themselves to the observation of the votaries of Osiris and Isis.

Happily the chief officiating priest, Orestes, had retired from the temple as soon as the ceremonies were over ; and had, with his sacerdotal brethren, attended the sacred bull back to the luxurious and richly-decorated dwelling that was assigned to him within the holy precincts. He had not, therefore, seen the meeting of Medora with her sister and the young Roman—

whom he well remembered at the entertainment given at his father's house at Alexandria, and towards whom he knew that Muthis entertained a not unpardonable feeling of jealousy.

The abbess led her young companions through the sacred chambers and galleries almost in silence. She seemed to fear lest the very walls should hear a Christian voice, and to be oppressed by the knowledge that a Christian's breath was mingling with the hallowed atmosphere of the temple precincts.

Nothing but her near relationship to Claudia, and pity for all that her niece had suffered, could have induced her to admit one of the despised sect under her own roof. She also entertained a hope that, while breathing the consecrated air of Philæ, and dwelling amongst its noble temples, Claudia's heart might be again brought back to a love and reverence for its divinities. Encouraged by this hope, she resolved to endure the society of her erring niece for a few days ; but longer than that she felt that it would be neither desirable nor safe to harbour her, an unbeliever, in the very stronghold of Osiris, and his most devoted followers.

Of Alypius she only knew what she had heard from her nephew Orestes—that he was a young Roman student, who had become acquainted with his family at Alexandria, and had shared their hospitality. Why he was now the companion of Claudia she could not guess, and felt anxious to ascertain.

In Arsinoë's simple but comfortable apartment, the abbess and Medora were informed of as much of the objects and motives of the travellers as they deemed it expedient to make known. The accidental entrance of Pyrrha caused another glad sur-

prise; for the faithful old nurse instantly recognised her elder charge, whom she dearly loved and deeply regretted.

Many were the questions which the warm-hearted and inquisitive Pyrrha poured forth; and many were the tears she shed, as Claudia told her of her sorrows and her bereavements. Indeed so deeply engrossed were all the females of the party in listening to the sad details, that Alypius thought it would be better to absent himself until the story, and the emotions that it aroused, had both passed by. He also felt his position with regard to Medora very embarrassing; for he tried in vain to address her as an ordinary acquaintance, and he knew that his countenance belied the effort. Neither did she appear at ease; and though she seemed to be absorbed in Claudia's melancholy narration, there was at times an abstracted and uneasy expression that showed her thoughts were wandering from her sister's story.

Alypius, therefore, expressed his wish to have an interview with Orestes; and was informed by the abbess that he might probably be found either on one of the terraces that overlooked the walls of the island, or on the lofty platform that crowned the tower over the great entrance to the temple. To one of these secluded spots it was his custom to retire after each public religious service, for the purpose of meditating on the mysteries of his faith, and holding communion with the spirit of Osiris.

A guide was summoned to conduct Alypius into the presence of the priest; and after some search along the terraces and corridors they were informed by one of his sacerdotal brethren, that Orestes had ascended to the summit of the propylæon,

and that his solemn converse with the gods must not be disturbed.

Alypius had, therefore, no alternative but to await his descent to lower regions and lower objects of attention; and, meanwhile, he persuaded his guide, who took him for an Egyptian, and a member of the pious abbess's family, to show him many of the sacred buildings, which would not have been accessible to him, either as a Roman or a Christian.

He guided him through long and gloomy passages that led to the foot of the propylæon; and he pointed out to him the light ladders by which Orestes had ascended from floor to floor of the lofty tower, drawing each ladder after him as he proceeded; and thus, for a time, cutting off all communication with the lower world, and securing himself from interruption.

Orestes was an earnest man; and the grand object of his life was the preservation of his ancient religion, and the extinction of opposing sects. He thought more of the exaltation of his deities, and the honour paid to them, than of his own aggrandisement and power. His meditations were therefore serious, and befitting the professed sanctity of the place. But it is to be feared that far other thoughts and schemes occupied the minds of many of his brethren, who at times sought the same privacy, either alone, or with a confidential companion.

Many were the schemes of ambition, or of covetousness, or of cruelty, which some of these ministers of a false religion concocted on this lofty platform, which was so elevated that no sound from below rose up to disturb the pious exercises or the worldly calculations of those who occupied it.

Alypius did not wish to be found as if watching the movements of the priests; he, therefore, requested his guide to conduct him again through the mysterious and dimly-lighted passages to the great square of the temple, where Orestes must pass on his descent from the tower; if, as was his wont, he repaired to the dwelling of the abbess.

Ere long a footstep was heard to break the almost unearthly silence of the place; and Orestes appeared, walking slowly, and as if absorbed in thought.

Alypius approached and greeted him, and was received with more of surprise than pleasure; for Orestes knew that he was no believer in the gods of Egypt, and he had once suspected him of being the rival of his friend Muthis.

But the young Roman did not appear to notice his coldness; and, after a few general remarks, he said:—

“I come as your mother’s messenger, Orestes. She had a very important communication to make to you and your sister; and she permitted me to be the bearer of it.”

“The betrothed husband of Medora would have been a more fitting emissary to this sacred isle than a member of the Roman nation and the Roman creed,” replied Orestes, rather proudly. “Does my mother,” he continued, in a softened tone, “who has abjured her own faith for one as false, and far more pernicious—does she still desire to destroy Medora’s peace, and her happy belief in the gods of Egypt? And has she chosen you as a suitable instrument to effect her purpose?”

Alypius knew not what to reply to this sudden attack; for he knew not what fears and suspicions had crossed the mind of Orestes since he had heard of his mother’s conversion to the

religion of Jesus, and her efforts to lead Medora to embrace the same faith. From his sister the priest had learned her own and her mother's repugnance to the proposed alliance with Muthis; and he also thought he had discovered that Medora felt an interest in the Roman student, whose attentions to her had been so disagreeable to her Egyptian suitor. He was, therefore, quite prepared to imagine some scheme that might be destructive to his own and his father's settled plans with respect to Medora's hand; and he was equally prepared to circumvent them.

In order to divert the conversation from its present very disagreeable course, Alypius resolved to enter at once on the subject which he desired to discuss with Orestes. So he quietly replied :

"Heaven knows, Orestes, that neither your excellent mother nor I would do anything to mar your sister's peace. But I did not seek you now to speak of Medora—you had another sister."

"I *had* another sister! Yes, in years long gone by I *had* a sister, who was my loved companion, and the object of my fondest hopes. But I have no other sister now; and do you wonder that I watch jealously over Medora in these degenerate and faithless days? But, Alypius," he continued, with some emotion, which showed that his heart was less hard and stern than he would have it appear, "why do you speak of that sister? Why do you revive memories that I have felt it my duty to banish from my mind, as a devoted servant of the gods whom she forsook and insulted?"

"Because, Orestes, it now seems to be your duty to remember that long-lost sister; to recall your mutual affection; to cherish

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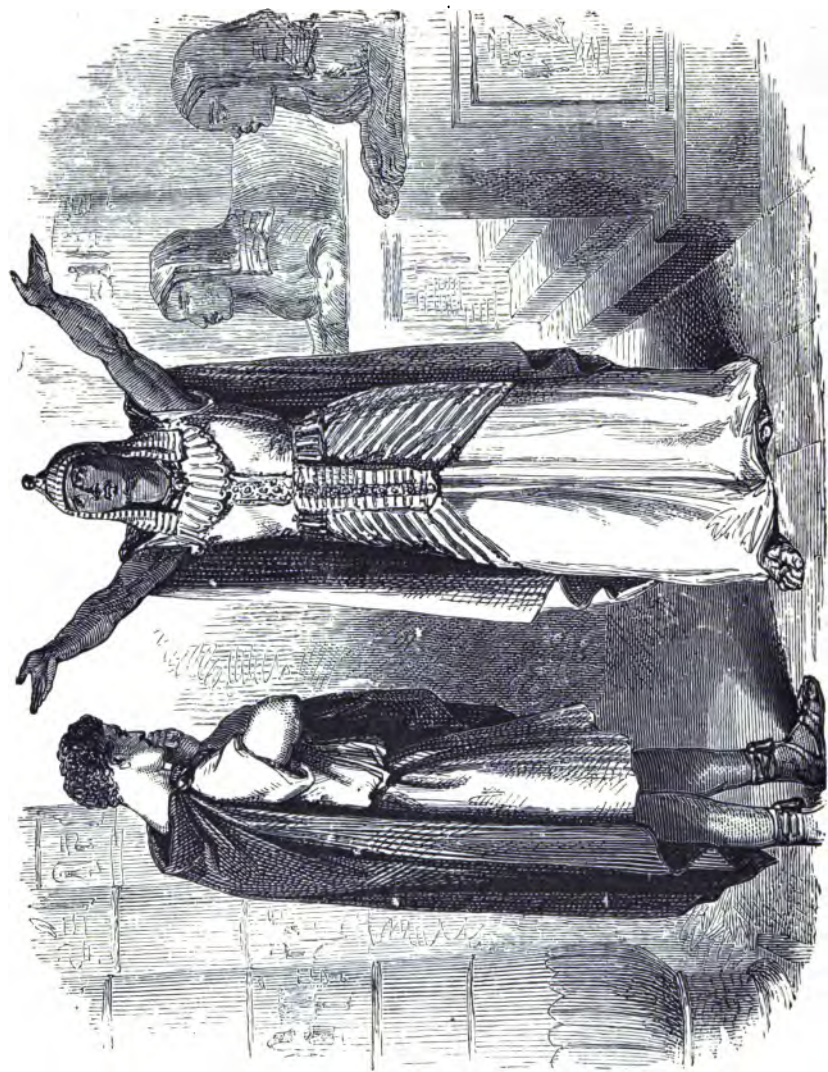
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THE APPEAL OF ORIENTES TO ORIENTS.—PAGE 200.

protect, and love her; and to win her a place once more in your father's heart and your father's home."

Orestes started; and his usually fixed and immovable features were agitated by very unwonted emotions.

"Tell me, Alypius," he said, in a low, deep voice, as he grasped his arm, "tell me at once—does Claudia yet live?"

"She does."

"And where?"

"She is on this island, Orestes."

"And her faith, Alypius? Has she returned to her ancient faith?"

"Your sister is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; and she will never deny him in life or in death."

"O thou that liest buried in this holy isle!" exclaimed Orestes, overcome with sudden grief and excitement, "thou whom I serve with my body and my spirit—thou great Osiris!—awaken my sister from her fatal blindness, and restore her to her family and her gods! Then will I serve thee with a deeper devotion, and give to thee greater sacrifices. But if thou wilt not take Claudia again for thy votary"—and here the uplifted hands and eyes of the priest fell towards the ground, and the light faded from his countenance as the sad alternative arose in his mind—"if thou wilt not again receive the recreant, then let her die here on this sacred spot; and do thou receive her soul in the regions of Amenti; and oh, do thou deal mercifully with it for the sake of all that I, thy faithful servant, have done for thee!"

It was a passionate prayer, and it was passionately uttered; and then Orestes stood silent and pale. His whole mien bore

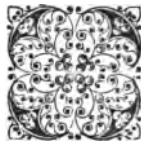
sad evidence to the sincerity of his appeal, and his faith in the deity whom he thus earnestly invoked.

Alypius was deeply moved.


"Oh that this ardent soul could be brought into thy fold, Lord Jesus!" he murmured to himself.

The last words fell on the ear of Orestes.

"And you too, Alypius!" he said, as he looked up and met his companion's gaze of deep interest, with a countenance from which all emotion had passed away, and which now only wore the stern, self-sustained expression which Alypius had hitherto seen on the features of the Egyptian priest. "I anticipated this," he continued, coldly and gravely. "I now perceive the bond of union between you and my unhappy sister. I now see why you are my mother's messenger to Philæ. This is no place for you, Alypius. I will not betray you to those who would resent your presence here; but I warn you that it would be dangerous for you to remain if it were known to my brethren that you are a Christian."



CHAPTER XXIII.

HEN Orestes and Alypius entered the apartment of Arsinoë, no one could have guessed from the demeanour of the priest that he had so lately been the subject of such violent emotions, or that his feelings towards his sister were sufficiently strong to have so greatly overcome his habitual self-command.

He met her kindly, indeed ; but an expression of austere displeasure soon drove away the smile of welcome that at first adorned it, and struck joy into the heart of Claudia.

The priest speedily made his sister feel that no one could be allowed to hold any place in his affections who was not true to the gods whom he served. He expressed a certain degree of interest in all that concerned her personally, and manifested a certain amount of sympathy in her sufferings and her bereavements ; but he repressed all sign of emotion, and he advised his sister to hasten her departure from the holy island.

To her request that Medora might return to Alexandria with her and Alypius, she received a very decided negative both from Orestes and the abbess ; who were perfectly agreed on the subject of her remaining in her present position of seclusion and safety, until she was summoned by her father to ratify the engagement which he had made for her.

The countenance of Medora fell at this decision ; and yet

she had scarcely dared to hope that she would be permitted to escape from what she had for some time past begun to feel a painful bondage, and to travel back to her home with her sister. Difficulties and trials seemed now to surround her, and she knew not how to avoid them. Each day she found that her feelings were less in unison with the forms and ceremonies in which she still continued to join. Her soul was aspiring more and more towards a purer religion and a more exalted standard than any that she had hitherto known.

The conversation of the abbess and her young companions had long ceased to interest her, for they could not enter into the workings of her mind ; and the slightest allusion to Christianity was received with horror and contempt by these devoted adherents to idolatry.

The instructions of her brother were even more irksome to her than the superstitious legends which Arsinoë was never weary of relating to her scholars : for Orestes tried to lead her into abstruse mysteries, and to occupy her active, practical mind with abstract reasoning and visionary speculations, such as he himself delighted in, but of which she had discovered the utter futility.

These subjects had formerly attracted Medora's attention to a considerable degree ; and she had found pleasure in listening to her brother's mystical theories and strange anticipations for the future. So promising a pupil had he found her during her former residence at Philæ, that he had sometimes regretted his father's not having yielded to her desire to become a priestess in the sacred island. Had he foreseen what would eventually be her choice, he would have employed all his influence both

with her and with his parents to preserve so bright an ornament to the service of Isis. But, happily for Medora, her fate was in higher and wiser hands than those of Orestes; and she was not to be left in the darkness and degradation of heathenism. The Lord had opened for her "a door of hope," and no man could close it.

Both Arsinoë and Orestes did all they could to prevent Medora from holding private converse with her sister or with Alypius; but the zeal and affection of Claudia were not to be baffled. She had undertaken the journey to Philæ with the one object of trying to rescue her beloved sister from the bonds of a deadly superstition, and no personal considerations could deter her from the attempt. She knew enough of the bigoted fanaticism and the unscrupulous conduct of many of the sacerdotal order to be well aware of the risk she had run in even venturing into the consecrated island; and she was not insensible to the still greater danger which she would incur, if she were suspected of trying to tamper with the faith of Medora. But her sister's soul was more precious to her than even her own life, and she lost no opportunity of urging upon her the blessed and glorious truths of the gospel.

Sometimes she contrived to be alone with Medora for a short time, during the absence of their aunt on official business; but one of the scholars was generally placed as a watch upon her on these occasions, and she was obliged to converse with her sister in the language of Rome, which they both understood. Alypius also occasionally joined in these interesting discussions; and his earnest and manly eloquence went far in convincing Medora of the fallacy of her hereditary religion, and the truth

of those doctrines, for the sake of which one so highly gifted had renounced the opinions of his teachers, his fellow-students, and the most learned philosophers of the civilized world.

But these meetings were few and brief; and not many days after their arrival in Philæ, Alypius and Claudia were informed by Orestes that they must depart. The agitated greeting between Medora and her sister in the great temple had been observed, and abundantly commented upon, by some of the priestesses, as well as by her own young companions, all of whom were well aware that the elder niece of the respected abbess was an outcast from her family, and a recreant from her national religion.

The young sisterhood were one and all so much attached to Medora, that for her sake they made no remarks on the ill-timed meeting, or on the exclamation by which she had betrayed the name of Claudia, and recalled her apostasy. They would have aided their friend in any plans by which the long-separated sisters might have enjoyed more of each other's society; and the one who was set as a spy over them by Arsinoë never revealed the fact that their conversation was incomprehensible to her, and that her office was therefore a sinecure.

There were, however, others among the spectators of the sisters' meeting who were not influenced by such kindly feelings. The scene in the temple was repeated, with many significant comments, to the ruling priests in the island; and before Orestes was aware that his sister's arrival was known beyond her aunt's dwelling, a council had been

privately held to which he was not invited ; and very decided measures were determined upon with regard to the heretical intruders.

Imprisonment in some of the mysterious dungeons of the temple was suggested as a proper punishment for the audacity of Claudia and her companion in entering the sacred building during the celebration of the solemn service ; and it was even hinted by one of the most zealous, that it might be prudent to prevent the return of Claudia to the outer world, by either compelling her to become a consecrated assistant in the temple of Isis ; or, if she should prove refractory, by disposing of her and her companion in a very summary manner.

Very little opposition was made to this proposal ; for the feeling against Christianity and all who professed it was very strong in Philæ. There was, however, one friend of Orestes present, who ventured to object to such cruel treatment ; but his opinion was disregarded, and it was resolved that the presumptuous strangers should be secured, and dealt with as the Egyptian sacerdotal law permitted.

It was agreed to effect the capture of Claudia and Alypius before making Orestes aware of the intention ; for he was known to be of a more humane disposition than the rest of his fraternity, and they feared he would not lend his aid to their scheme. Then, when the intended victims were in their power, they proposed to use his influence with his sister to induce her to renounce her new faith. If this could be done by gentle means, it would be well ; but if Claudia should display the firmness which had been shown by so many of her sect, then other measures might be resorted to, which no

consideration for the feelings of Orestes should lead them to forego.

Manothes, the friend of the absent priest, listened to all these arrangements. He was as bigoted as his brethren, and as unscrupulous in regard to the nature of any transactions that were to promote the honour of the gods, and check the growth of Christianity ; but he loved Orestes, who had been a faithful friend to him for years, and he could not forbear warning him that danger was threatening his sister.

He did not venture to tell him all that he had heard ; for he was under authority, and he feared the possible consequences to himself, if it should be known that he had betrayed what took place at a secret council. But he told Orestes that his sister and the Roman had been seen in the temple, and that the anger and vengeance of some of the holy guardians of the island were aroused.

This was enough : for Orestes knew his brethren, and knew what spirit they were of. So he informed Claudia and Alypius that they must quit the island on the following day, and that a boat should be ready to convey them to the eastern shore of the river about noon.

Orestes made few comments on this hurried departure. Indeed, he was well pleased that the stay of the Christians at Philæ should be speedily brought to a close. He feared for Claudia and her friend ; but he feared much more for Medora, of whose steadfast faith in the gods of Egypt he had begun to entertain some very painful doubts.

He felt that it would be a relief to him when the sister whom he still loved with so strong an affection was out of his sight.

He desired her safety, he would have done much to preserve her from personal danger or suffering; but her presence was oppressive to him, now that he knew she despised his deities, and worshipped the Jewish "carpenter's Son." The very possibility of her leading his younger sister to embrace her errors was agony to his devoted, but sadly erring soul.

He left his aunt's dwelling, and went to pay his devotions to the sacred bull, and then to hold communion with the spirit of the risen Osiris on the most secluded terrace of the island.

Claudia and Medora were sad: the last day of their renewed sisterly intercourse was waning away, and every moment was precious. Softly they conversed in a recess of Arsinoë's apartment, while the aged abbess reclined on a couch and read, or fancied she read, some sacred legends which were inscribed on a roll of papyrus, and at length she fell into a gentle sleep.

"Medora—dear Medora!" urged Claudia, in a low, earnest voice, "I could leave you more contentedly if I knew that the peace of God reigned in your heart, and that you could look to his Son Jesus Christ for comfort now and hope hereafter. Tell me that you believe in him—tell me, at least, that you will pray, and try to believe in him."

"I have prayed; and I have tried, my sister, ever since I returned to Philæ; and more than ever since I have seen you, and heard your sweet words of peace."

"And can it be that it is all in vain?" asked Claudia, eagerly. "Can it be that you still prefer darkness to light—error to truth?"

A sweet smile lit up Medora's lovely countenance as she lifted up her face, and replied firmly, but gently,—

"No, Claudia, that could not be. I begin to see clearly that all the holiest, all the purest, all the most spiritual conceptions of our old religion are but faint emblems and dim shadows of the truths of Christianity. Now I feel my own ignorance and darkness—now I bitterly regret the time and the opportunities that I have neglected—now I yearn for more knowledge ; and where shall I obtain it ? I have drunk in all that you and Alypius have said to me, and I have thought upon it in the silence of the night ; but I forbore to tell you of the deep impression that your words were making on my heart, until I could feel sure that I really understood and received it all. You are to leave me tomorrow, and I shall hear no more of Jesus, and all that he has done for me ; but I shall not forget. Be sure I shall remember all, and meditate on all, and my faith will grow stronger."

"Oh, Medora !" exclaimed Claudia, and she grasped her sister's hand, "you have indeed made me happy—you have lifted a heavy burden from my heart. Now I can return to our mother and tell her that both her daughters are sharers in her blessed faith. But, Medora, how can I leave you here among the teachers and the votaries of idolatry ? Oh that you could come with us !"

A deep blush suffused Medora's features, and her eyes fell. Then in a low and timid voice she said,—

"Would it be possible, Claudia ?"

The sisters looked into each other's eyes, and seemed to read each other's thoughts ; but for a time they did not speak.

Rapidly Medora's colour went and came, and her breath was quick and almost gasping. She felt that she was at a great crisis of her life, and that on her present action her whole future life might depend.

"It is possible, sister," she whispered, with much emotion. "There is but one way for me to escape from misery and degradation; and that is to return with you to Alexandria, and throw myself on our father's kindness and justice. I think I see a way."

Hurriedly the sisters whispered together, and many were the schemes that were proposed, and rejected as hopeless of execution. Still they clung desperately to the project, and were resolved not to abandon it until the very last effort had been made.

Their conference was at length interrupted rather suddenly by Pyrrha, who entered the room noiselessly; and approaching the place where Claudia and Medora were still so earnestly engaged in conversation as to be unconscious of her presence, she gently laid her hand on the arm of her young mistress, and then, as noiselessly, withdrew towards the doorway.

As she did so, she made a sign to Medora to follow, which she immediately did; and then, leading her into an obscure corridor, the faithful nurse said, in a very low voice, and looking anxiously around her as she spoke,—

"The Lady Claudia must not remain another night on this island. Danger threatens her and her friend, and the only way of safety is by an immediate flight."

"My brother has warned them to depart, Pyrrha, and has promised to arrange all for their crossing the river at mid-day to-morrow. Surely there can be no need for any greater haste. It would be hard to deprive me of their—I mean of Claudia's society, even one hour before necessity requires it."

Pyrrha looked at her sadly and sympathizingly. She had long ago, at Alexandria, made a shrewd guess that the young

Roman was more agreeable to her mistress than her Egyptian suitor ; and since Alypius had been on the island, the faithful old domestic had seen enough to convince her that his affections were deeply engaged, and that Medora returned the feeling far more than she was herself aware of. She well knew how little hope there could be of such an attachment leading to anything but misery ; and therefore she looked sadly at the fair young girl as she replied,—

“ Believe me, there is need, imperative need, for haste. Not an hour is to be lost. The priests of Osiris are aware that Christians have defiled the temple of their god, by entering it while the sacred ceremonies were being performed ; and they are resolved to seize the offenders, and either compel them to an act of worship of their deity, or keep them in some place of concealment and security. Medora, I have heard what those places are ; I have heard of the dungeons beneath the temple, and the very thought of our Lady Claudia being cast into one of them makes my blood curdle. Do not hope that the priests will relent. If once the Christians are in their power, not even the influence of Orestes could save them.”

“ I know that they are fanatical and unforgiving, and I would not for worlds that any one I love should be exposed to the cruel zeal of those men. We must act, Pyrrha,—we must act promptly. But tell me, how did you acquire all this information ?”

“ From a poor woman, the wife of one of the servants of the temple. Her husband has received orders from the chief priest to be in readiness this very night to assist in carrying out his intentions. You know the man : it is he whom you visited in

his sickness, and to whom you gave aid and comfort, and kind words. He has never forgotten you ; and he told his wife that it was a sore trial of his obedience to be commanded to lay hands on a sister of yours, even though she might be a Christian. I believe he did not dare to bid his wife give any word of warning ; but she guessed his wishes, and she obeyed them."



CHAPTER XXIV.

MEDORA continued to question Pyrrha, until she had learned all that her faithful old friend had to tell; and all the while she was pondering within herself how it would be possible to avert the threatened danger.

The only plan which she could devise was to gain over the man who felt himself so much indebted to her; and, by promising him a large reward, to induce him to assist in their escape. With this view Medora desired her nurse to return to Yanina, and entreat her to come to the abbess' dwelling without loss of time.

Then she prepared to return to Claudia, and inform her of what had occurred. As she turned away from Pyrrha, a deep sigh escaped her, and she said, in a tone almost of despair,—

“Would to God I could also escape!”

“Has Medora prayed to her new God to help her?” inquired Pyrrha, who knew all that had passed in the mind of her mistress, and who had dutifully followed her step by step, in her way from heathenism to Christianity.

Medora paused, and looked at Pyrrha with more of hope and confidence as she replied,—

“I have prayed, and I know that my prayer is heard. I will hope, Pyrrha; yes, I will hope. Now we must use all our own energies, and trust to the Lord to bless them.”

When Medora re-entered the sitting-room she found both Alypius and Orestes there. They were conversing with the abbess on the proposed journey on the morrow, while Claudia sat apart, silent and dejected.

It seemed long before Medora could with safety make any sign to her sister, and she knew that every moment was of consequence. At length she made some pretext for leaving the apartment, and by a significant glance drew Claudia after her. The story of danger was soon told, and Claudia's first impulse was to return at once to Orestes, and tell him of the cruel conspiracy. This would also have been Medora's wish, had she not had a hope of leaving the island with her sister. She felt confident that Orestes would never join in the scheme of his brethren, and that he would at least connive at the escape of Claudia and Alypius, even if he took no active part in it. But she also knew that he would effectually oppose her own plan; and that, when once her friends were gone, her own release would be hopeless, except on terms which she was resolved never to agree to. Claudia saw all this in a moment, and perceived that secrecy and dispatch were necessary.

Yanina soon appeared, and she entered warmly into all that was proposed to her. Her gratitude was as lively as her husband's; and she also had wishes of her own that led her to espouse the cause of the sisters with double zeal and energy. Yanina earnestly desired to leave the island, which was to her a gloomy prison, and to return to the busy and active life which she had formerly led at Alexandria, before her husband had been persuaded to enter the temple service at Philæ. If Indah could be persuaded to assist in the escape of the three

young people, and to share their flight, her long-cherished object would be gained. Indeed, if Indah consented to any part of the proposed plan, he must agree to all ; for it would be impossible for him to conceal his share in the escape of their intended victims from the priests, and equally impossible to avert from himself their consequent vengeance.

Very readily Yanina set off in quest of her husband ; and she was empowered to offer him so liberal a reward for his services as appeared to her quite irresistible, and more than sufficient to make up for any losses which his sudden departure might bring upon him.

Meanwhile it was necessary that Alypius should be made aware of the new arrangements and their cause. But this was not easily effected. Orestes seemed inclined to remain all the evening at his aunt's residence, and Arsinoë was peculiarly lively and vigilant. The sun set, and a soft gloom fell on all within and without. Happily the abbess did not order her attendants to light the quaint Egyptian lamps which decorated the apartment ; but she requested Medora to sing to her cithara or guitar, as she wished her sister to hear what great proficiency she had made in this accomplishment.

It was a trying request to Medora, but she instantly complied ; and while, with a beating heart and quivering lips, she sang a slow and plaintive air, Claudia softly drew near to Alypius, and startled him from his wrapt attention and his melancholy musing by whispering in his ear,—

“Leave the room the moment this song is ended, and wait for me at the last arch of the corridor. If I do not soon join you, seek for Pyrrha, and listen to all she has

to tell you; then act as you see best. Time is very precious."

Then she approached Medora, and, with as calm a manner as she could command, she spoke to her of her music, and of her home at Alexandria, and of all that she should have to tell their mother of her meeting with her beloved sister.

Meanwhile Alypius had hurried from the apartment, and without waiting for Claudia to follow him, he had proceeded to Pyrrha's room, where he found her in deep conference with Yanina.

Rapidly Pyrrha repeated to him all that she had told to Claudia; and she then informed him that Medora's offer to Yanina's husband had proved tempting enough to induce him to abandon his present position, and share in the projected flight.

While she was detailing to him the plan which Indah had confided to his wife, as the best that he could devise for effecting the desired escape, Claudia joined the little conclave, and listened eagerly to all that had been so cleverly arranged.

"And now for the execution, Alypius," she said. "Not one moment is to be wasted in our preparations."

"And is Medora to be left alone among these fanatics?" asked Alypius, sadly.

"No; that shall not be," replied Claudia, firmly and decidedly. "She is ready to depart with us, and to share our dangers, as"—she added in a whisper—"she shares our faith. We will not leave her here, where she could no longer be safe; for she will never again take any part in the worship of the gods of Philæ."

"Now, God be praised for that assurance," said Alypius fervently. "Has she declared this? Has Medora owned herself a Christian?"

"She has," replied Claudia. "She has done so this very evening, in the belief that we were to part to-morrow. But we will not part. Both my sister and Pyrrha shall accompany us—and even if we should fail in effecting our escape, and the cruel priests should arrest us, they cannot injure her; for they will not suspect the pious and devoted Medora of having abandoned her cherished faith in Isis."

"Now I feel ready to face every danger, and overcome every difficulty, since Medora is to be one of our party. We cannot fail, Claudia—it is impossible!"

"I trust you are right," answered Claudia, more composedly. "But we must act—not talk. Time is passing rapidly; and we must be on the other side of the river before daybreak. Pyrrha, I trust to you to make every necessary arrangement for Medora's comfort. She must not arouse the suspicions of our aunt by absenting herself until the usual hour of retiring for the night."

"All shall be ready," replied the devoted Pyrrha. "I would lay down my life willingly to be sure that my dear young mistress would leave this island to-night, and would never again set foot upon it. It is a den of cruelty and wickedness, Lady Claudia. I never knew anything of the vile mysteries of this place, until Yanina told me what she had seen and heard. Most thankful shall I be to find myself once more in Alexandria!"

"We shall all be equally thankful, Pyrrha. And in order to accomplish our desire we must be quick, and we must be

cautious. Go, Yanina, and express our gratitude to your husband. At the hour he has named we will meet him."

Claudia and Alypius returned to the abbess' apartment; and soon afterwards Orestes took leave of them, proposing to see them in the morning, and attend them to the landing-place, where the boat would be ready to convey them to the opposite shore.

No sooner had the priest left the house, than Alypius also bade the abbess and her nieces good night; and retired to his own abode, not to seek rest in sleep, but to make hasty preparations for a midnight escape.

Indah awaited him, as had been arranged with Yanina; and their plans were finally settled—not, however, without much anxiety; for Indah feared the vigilance of the sacerdotal band and their attendants; and both he and Alypius were well aware that no personal courage could avail to save all their party from the vengeance of the priests, if once their scheme were detected.

The bare idea of Medora being in any way exposed to their wrath, was anguish to Alypius. He would have sacrificed all his own feelings and wishes, if, by leaving her at Philæ, her safety and comfort could have been secured. But he knew that it would be far otherwise; he knew that Medora would never act the part of a hypocrite, and that if she were convinced of the truth of Christianity, she would never again join in heathen worship. And then, a cruel fate might be hers, and her brother would have no power to save her! No; she must escape with him and Claudia; or they must fail, and suffer together.

With this conviction, he completed all his arrangements with Indah ; and then returned to the residence of the abbess, wrapped in a large burnouse, and took up his position in the deep shadow of a heavy colonnade, to await the appearance of his female companions.

The moon was high in the heavens, and her soft beams fell on all the solemn and mysterious-looking buildings which surrounded Alypius. So strange, so dreamlike, and so beautiful was the scene ; so perfect was the stillness, and so serene the clear vault that overarched the whole, that he could have spent hours in that spot contentedly, had his own feelings partaken of the deep repose that rested on all visible objects. But his heart was beating with strong excitement, and his attention was on a painful stretch for any faint sound, or any moving object, that might reach his quick ear or eye.

At length, when the stars told him it was midnight, he beheld four female forms issue from the dark entrance of the college buildings, and with noiseless tread cross the moonlit court, and approach the spot where he stood. They were all dressed in the costume of the lower order of Egyptian women, such as was worn by the female domestics and attendants on the sacerdotal families residing on the island. With these Yanina had provided them ; and so entirely were Claudia and Medora disguised, that, until they raised their veils, even Alypius could not distinguish them.

They all carried baskets, in which were deposited such articles as they cared to take away with them : this added to their menial appearance, and completed their necessary disguise.

Yanina made a sign for silence; and the whole party followed her without uttering a word. Cautiously she led them to the great temple; Claudia and Medora trembled as they passed through the grand entrance. It seemed like rushing into destruction, but it was the only way of escape; and it must be attempted. The regular landing-place was always vigilantly guarded at night; and only those who could avail themselves of the secret passages which led from the temple to the rock-bound shore of the island, could leave its precincts unknown to the authorities.

Yanina knew all the mysterious passages; for she had been employed with her husband in the temple service, which had given her a considerable knowledge of its subterranean construction. She, therefore, advanced with confidence, though with care and caution. She trusted implicitly to Indah, who had preceded the party, in order to ascertain that no one was in the way; and who was to hasten back, and warn them to retire if any signs of danger should appear.

One dark lantern, which Yanina carried, was all the light with which they were provided; and, guided by this faint glimmer, they passed along gloomy arched passages, down winding steps, and through cold vaulted chambers; where the slightest sound of their footsteps was echoed, and filled them with alarm.

At length they reached a heavy closed door, that seemed to forbid all further advance; and, at the same time, they heard hurried footsteps overhead, which resounded fearfully in the subterranean apartment.

Yanina tried the door—it was fastened on the outside. For

a moment she stood pale and aghast, for she feared her husband had been discovered and arrested, and that the door was secured by the dreaded priests. If so, they were all indeed lost, for they were completely in the power of those who would show them no mercy.

The fugitives did not speak ; they feared to hear even their own voices in that dungeon-like chamber. But Alypius instinctively drew a dagger from his breast, and placed himself close to Medora ; as if he felt that he had power to protect her from every danger. Vain thought ! he might have died for her, or with her : he could not have saved her.

Happily his courage and devotion were not thus put to the test. The Christians had placed all their trust in Him for whose name's sake they were now in peril, and he did not desert them.

While they all stood in anxious expectation, and Claudia was whispering a few words of comfort and encouragement to her sister, a gentle knocking was heard on the other side of the door.

"It is Indah !" exclaimed Yanina, in a voice of sudden joy. "Open quickly, my husband," she continued, applying her lips to the door. "There are footsteps in the hall above !"

Instantly the door turned on its heavy hinges, and the bright moonlight streamed into the dungeon.

"Now make speed !" cried Indah ; "and we are safe. I kept the door fastened until I could get rid of one of the temple servants, who met me in one of the passages, and followed me hither, curiously inquiring what might be my errand to the



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private landing-place. I pleaded a secret commission, and entreated him to go round by the pathway along the rocks to his own dwelling, and to bring me a boat-cloak. He went at length, but there was suspicion in his eye; and I fear he may have aroused those whose footsteps have alarmed you. Hasten to the boat."

He gave his hand to Claudia, and Alypius assisted Medora, whose steps were steady, though her cheek was deadly pale.

They rapidly descended the rocky slope by steps cut in its surface; Pyrrha and Yanina followed. Springing into a boat which lay hidden in the shadow, Indah and Alypius each seized an oar, and were on the point of leaving the shore; when the former dropped his oar, and sprang again on the rocky pathway, exclaiming;—

"I must secure that door. If we are pursued, it will be by the way you have come. We must prevent any one from following us!"

He bounded up the steps, and hastily locked and barred the door. He was not a moment too soon; for as he leaped down the steps he heard the door violently shaken from within, and then several voices called upon his name.

But he was in the boat, and had pushed it from the rock. A few strokes of the oars carried the little vessel to a safe distance, before the man, who had so evidently given the alarm, appeared on the pathway by which he had left the spot. He carried a large cloak on his arm; and, in a friendly voice, he begged Indah to return and take it. While he spoke, he unfastened the door; and several dark figures rushed out, and hurried down to the water's edge.

Loudly they called on Indah to return, and promised him a full pardon, and a rich reward, if he would bring the fugitives again to shore. But Indah only indulged in a low chuckling laugh, and plied his oar with a vigour that was well seconded by the strong arms of Alypius.

Then the entreaties of their pursuers were changed into curses loud and fierce. The souls of the whole party, and especially Indah, were consigned to all the horrors of Amenti; and threatened with a transmigration into the forms of the most loathsome and degraded animals—into toads and swine.

The habitual fear and reverence which both Indah and his wife entertained for the priests, and their belief in their being endowed with supernatural power, caused them to tremble as these awful denunciations reached their ears. But their knowledge of the unscrupulous and fanatical character of the priests led them to doubt the fair promises they now made; and, even if they could have secured their own safety, and a rich remuneration for their treachery, they would not have delivered up those who had placed so much confidence in them, into the hands of such cruel enemies.



CHAPTER XXV.

HAPPILY—we should rather say, providentially—the moon retired behind a thick, heavy mist that rose up from the western desert, just as our fugitive party got beyond hearing the voices of the angry priests. Soon the whole sky was overcast, and darkness surrounded the little boat. The island was shrouded from view, and would have been altogether invisible, but for a few lights which could still be discerned, and which, as they moved rapidly from place to place, showed that the sacred island was in a state of unwonted alarm and commotion.

Hitherto the boat had taken a westerly course, and had appeared to be making directly for a small village on that side of the Nile; but as soon as her course could no longer be observed from the island, Indah gave the word, and she was allowed to drop down considerably to the south of Philæ. Then the rowers resumed their oars, and with redoubled efforts struck across the smooth, lake-like reach of the river, in the centre of which the sacred island stands, like a jewel set in a silver shield, towards the spot from which they had embarked not very many days before.

They felt sure that the priests, if they pursued them, would seek them on the western shore, as less frequented, and also as having seen them leave the island in that direction.

They reached the land, and as soon as they had disembarked, Indah waded as far as he could go into the water, pushing the boat before him, and then he let it drift away down the river, to be dashed to pieces in the cataracts, and never to be found as a witness to the course the fugitives had taken.

The night was very dark, and the travellers knew not where to seek for shelter, or where to find a conveyance for themselves and their baggage. They therefore removed to some distance from the shore, and rested behind some high sand-banks, which they were assured would effectually conceal them from the view of any who should look out from Philæ when daylight returned.

In this retired spot they remained until the first streaks of golden light appeared beyond the distant mountain-chain. Overcome by fatigue and excitement, Claudia and Medora slept on a bed of warm dry sand, and trusted to the vigilance of Alypius and Indah, who kept a careful watch, and often mounted the bank to observe whether any object were moving across the calm surface of the water.

As daylight broke Claudia and her sister awoke, and started up with a feeling of terror and expectation, and hardly knowing where they were, or what had occurred to bring them to so strange a place.

The happy countenance of Alypius which met their gaze quickly reassured them, and they immediately entered into council as to their future proceedings. The increasing light showed them a distant Arab encampment on the level plain that stretched away to the foot of the mountains.

To this camp they resolved to repair, and throw themselves on the hospitality of the sheik, hoping that he would not refuse

them shelter and protection, and perhaps also a safe escort to some village where they could engage a conveyance towards Thebes.

They immediately commenced their walk, and before they reached the outskirts of the scattered camp, the glorious sun had risen on the earth, and all looked bright and animated. The encampment was evidently on the stir; but as yet they could not distinguish any of the individuals who were moving about among the low, dark tents.

A clump of low bushes lay in their way to the Arab camp; and as they approached it they heard a sad, moaning sound, that attracted the attention of Medora. She left the party, and hastened to the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and saw a young boy lying on the ground, with his face buried in his hands, while deep sobs shook his slight frame. Medora stooped and laid her hand on his shoulder, and in a low, sweet voice asked him why he wept so bitterly.

The boy started violently, sprang to his feet, and gazed at Medora with his large dark eyes, from which the scalding tears of outraged feeling were flowing down his pale, sallow cheeks. It was the boy who had so greatly interested her friends the day that the boat was taken up the cataracts.

For a moment his sobs ceased, and a ray of pleasure passed over his features while he met the look of compassionate sympathy that beamed in Medora's eyes; but then, as if some painful contrast rushed into his mind, a fresh burst of grief overpowered him, and, straining his little hands over his eyes, he trembled with suppressed sobs.

There was something inexpressibly touching in the sorrow of

this child. He seemed to be alone in his grief, with no gentle hand to dry his tears, no loving voice to whisper peace to the poor young breaking heart. Alas for the unknown and untold sufferings of sensitive and friendless children ! Surely a desolate child who feels his desolation, a young spirit that is conscious of being crushed and oppressed, is among the most piteous things on earth ! It is a sight to make an angel weep. But, thanks be unto Him who governs all things, there will be no oppression, no desolation in that home beyond the sky, where our Elder Brother will reign for ever, and where all will be one holy, happy, loving family !

Had this Arab boy ever heard of that home in heaven ? Had he any recollection of ever having had a home, a blessed, happy home on earth ? If he had, it only made his tears flow more abundantly and more bitterly, as he tried to reply to the questions which Medora put to him in Egyptian. To her surprise, the child seemed perfectly to understand her, and looked up eagerly and intelligently as she spoke what must, she thought, be a strange and unfamiliar language to him.

At length, in reply to Medora's repeated inquiries as to the cause of his grief, he said slowly, and as if he felt both shame and pain at the admission,—

“He struck me—he has often done so, and he drove me from the tent. But he did more, he cursed my mother !”

As he said these words, the boy looked up with proud indignation, and then added,—

“He told me I was the son of a Christian dog ! Could I bear that ? Oh that I were old enough to defend myself, or to run away from the camp and earn my own bread !”

"But your mother? you would not leave her?" said Medora, soothingly.

"What do you mean, lady?" said the boy, wonderingly.

"Is not the sheik your father?" asked Medora, with increasing interest. "And does not your mother dwell in those tents? and is she not a Christian captive?"

"Oh no," replied the boy, with a heavy sigh. "If my mother were with me, I should not be treated as I so often am. My mother, my own dear mother, was gentle, and good, and beautiful—she was like you, lady." And he again burst into tears.

Claudia had by this time joined them, and overheard the words of the poor child. She shook from head to foot. A faintness came over her, a vague feeling of hope and fear, that amounted to agony, and she caught Medora's arm for support.

As she did so, the loose outer robe fell back, and exposed her wrist, on which was the golden bracelet that she had worn ever since the day that she found it among the ruins of her former dwelling.

The child looked up, and his tearful eyes fell on the glittering ornament. He started, and gazed at it and then at Claudia, whose eyes were riveted to his countenance, but she could not speak.

"I have a bracelet like that," he said: and he rolled up the short close sleeve of his vest, and showed the fellow-bracelet encircling his arm.

A faint cry escaped from Claudia's lips, and she sank on the ground senseless.

Alypius, who had been making some arrangements with

Indah at a little distance, was at her side in a moment. A few words from Medora told him the cause of her sister's agitation; and while he assisted her and Pyrrha in restoring Claudia to consciousness, he hastily questioned the astonished child, and learned from him all he knew of his past life—enough to solve the mystery, and fully account for Claudia's overpowering emotion.

Soon she opened her eyes, and looked wildly and searchingly around, till she saw the boy standing by her side, and gazing at her with a strange and puzzled expression.

"Cleon!" she exclaimed, as she rose and caught him in her arms.

"That was my name," said the boy, as he instinctively returned her embrace. "But how did you know it? They call me Selim in the camp."

"My child! my own child! my Cleon!" murmured Claudia, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. "How could I have failed to recognise you at once? My heart was drawn towards you; but I little thought that you were my long-lost son!"

"Are you my mother?" asked the wondering child, with a look of happiness that had long been a stranger to his young countenance. "I was sure I had seen you before. And may I go with you? You will not leave me with the cruel sheik?"

"Leave you, my Cleon? never!" exclaimed the happy mother, and again she clasped him to her throbbing heart. "We will go to the sheik at once. He cannot attempt to keep you from your own mother." Then she looked at the two bracelets and smiled, as she said, "How is it that the sheik did not deprive you of your ornament, my boy? I found the other

among the ruins of our dwelling near the desert ; and I thought the Arabs had carried you off for the sake of the jewels."

"Sheik Ibrahim is stern and cruel, but he is honest and truthful," replied Cleon, as he walked by his mother's side, and clung lovingly to her hand. "He and his men took away all that they could carry from our home, and then set fire to the building. They took me with them, though I cried for you, and begged to be left till you returned home ; but they said that I might bring them into trouble if I were left to tell what the tribe had done, and they dragged me away. One of the sheik's wives wanted to take my bracelet, but Ibrahim forbade it. He said it was all I had in the world, and I should keep it ; for it might be of use to me at some future time—and so it has been."

"It has indeed !" said Claudia. "But I ought to have known you without it."

Presently the travellers reached the camp. They desired to be conducted to the sheik. He was seated on a carpet on the floor of his tent, and he rose courteously to receive his visitors. He instantly recognised Alypius, whom he had seen in the boat ; and he saluted him and his companions with dignified politeness ; but he glanced at Cleon with displeasure, and said,—

"Why are you here, Selim ? Begone !" The sheik spoke angrily, and seemed to forget the presence of the strangers.

Only Claudia understood all that Ibrahim said. She had acquired some knowledge of the language of the Arabs when she resided on the border of the desert.

To the strangers the Arab chief spoke in Egyptian, with which he was quite familiar, and in that language Claudia now addressed him. Holding Cleon by the hand, she claimed him

as her child. The sheik could not deny the claim ; and as he had no longer any motive for detaining the boy, the happy mother left the tent with her long-lost son.

Tents were given to the travellers in which they might rest and refresh themselves until the great heat of the day had abated, when Ibrahim promised to furnish them with an escort, and also with beasts of burden to convey their baggage to the village, where they could obtain a boat, and float down the now subsiding river to Alexandria.

The repose of the camp was very grateful to Claudia and Medora after the fatigue of mind and body which they had undergone ; and the latter was greatly amused and interested by observing the manners of the wandering tribe, which were altogether new to her.

The hours passed rapidly ; and long before Medora's curiosity was gratified, and before Claudia had had time to make acquaintance with Cleon's friends, and to show her gratitude towards all who had treated him with kindness, the escort was ready at the tent-door.

Soon the baggage was packed on the backs of mules and asses ; Medora and Claudia were mounted on small active Arab steeds, and the sheik himself placed Cleon on a young horse of pure breed and fine shape, begging him to keep it in remembrance of his life in the desert ; and the little cavalcade set forth.



CHAPTER XXVI.



VERY happy party was that which passed through the straggling encampment, and wound round the hills that lay to the south of the plain.

Claudia was fully engaged with her newly-found son. How much she had to tell him—and how much to ask of all that he had done, and seen, and felt, and suffered during the last years of his young life! And, above all, how much had she to hear of his simple, childish faith, and love for his Redeemer; and his trust in him through all his loneliness and all his trials!

Joy—deep and abounding joy—was it for this much-tried Christian mother to listen to the ingenuous replies which Cleon made to her anxious inquiries, and to find that the good seed which she had sown in his heart during the years of early childhood had been watered by the dews of heaven, and breathed on by the Spirit of grace, and had taken deep and abiding root!

Cleon had been his mother's constant companion until he was so cruelly taken away from her; and, young as he was, he had comprehended that she endured loneliness and privation because she loved the Lord Jesus Christ, who had taken his father to live with him in heaven. Often had he promised his mother that nothing should ever induce him to forget or deny his father's

God, or lose the hope of meeting him again in a home above the skies.

For the spiritual growth of her darling child, Claudia had prayed, and hoped, and striven, so long as he was spared to her; and when she lost him, he still continued to be the one chief object of her thoughts and her petitions.

It was for his sake, and, as it were, in memory of him, that she had given so much affection and so much care to the young Icilius. And when she was deprived of him by the cruel death of martyrdom, it was to her bleeding heart as if Cleon had again been torn from her, and slain and mangled in the form of Icilius.

This feeling it was which filled up her bitter cup of woe, and shook her reason; and it was the restoration of her loved and lamented child which now gave to her features an air of repose, and to her form a vigour and elasticity, which neither Alypius nor her sister had seen in her before.

Medora and Alypius too were also fully occupied. It was the first time that they had ever conversed together alone; and, for a time, as the young Roman walked beside the Egyptian maiden's horse, and looked up into her beaming face, he felt considerable embarrassment.

But soon the ease and vivacity of her manner restored his composure; and he talked with her freely of the past and of the future; but carefully avoided any mention of his own feelings, or any expression which could imply that he had undertaken the journey to Philæ with any other hope or object than to act as an escort to her sister.

Then he spoke of Claudia's steadfast faith, and of her attain-

ments in religious knowledge. He told how her residence with his mother had been blessed to Calanthe; and how much he felt himself indebted to her—not only for the conversion of his beloved mother, but also for the spiritual instruction which he had derived from her conversation and her example during the time that they had been fellow-travellers.

Medora appeared to take a deep interest in all that Alypius told her of himself, and of all the spiritual conflicts which he had gone through since the day that he had first seen her in the Circus at Alexandria; even until the blessed time when it pleased the Lord to open his eyes, and the eyes of his friend Augustine, to the errors of their past lives, and to show them the way of peace and salvation in the gospel of Christ.

Every word was listened to with deep attention by the young inquirer. In much that Alypius related of his own feelings, his own doubts and fears, Medora could fully sympathize; and her speaking eyes and changing colour showed the speaker that he had succeeded in arousing the interest of his hearer.

How animated he became! how really eloquent! And how lovely did the desert scenery appear! how smooth and pleasant the pathless, and often stony way! How rapidly passed the hours of this journey, which, to those whose time and attention were not agreeably occupied, might have proved a very wearisome one! It is an old, old story; but happy hearts make sunshine and beauty for themselves, under the most unfavourable circumstances; and a cheerful spirit has proved a continual feast ever since the days of Solomon.

Very happy and very cheerful were Alypius and Medora; and very grateful were they to the Lord, who had so mercifully

guided their steps, and brought them safely out of the perils which had threatened them. And still more grateful were they to the same Lord, who had brought them "out of darkness into his marvellous light;" who had already given them some experience of the "joy and peace of believing" in him, and some foretaste of "the glorious liberty of the children of God;" and who, they were assured, would finish the good work which he had begun in their hearts, and keep them for his own in life and in death.

Perhaps those who have been brought up in a knowledge of the way of salvation from their earliest childhood, can hardly form an idea of the marvellous revulsion of feeling which must take place in the heart and mind of an idolater—of one whose spirit has been bowed down and degraded by idol worship, or by heathen unbelief and heathen superstition—when first the glorious light of the gospel, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, breaks in upon the darkened soul. No comparison of light and darkness, no contrast of liberty with slavish bondage, can give an adequate idea of the spiritual change from heathenism to Christianity.

And this change had come over the souls of Alypius and Medora; and they were yet enjoying their new-found liberty with all the zest of novelty, and all the joy and wonder of captives unexpectedly liberated.

No marvel was it that they found now a double pleasure in each other's society; and that, while they thus enjoyed it in peace and security, they for a while forgot that it could not be always so; that many barriers divided their future paths through life, and that fanaticism, obstinacy, self-interest, and revenge,

would all be aroused in the breasts of Sophis and Muthis, and would all be arrayed against them, and forbid any hopes of future happiness that were—unbidden and unacknowledged, indeed, but none the less vividly—arising in the minds of each.

By nightfall the travellers reached the village where Claudia had taken a carriage on their way up the river, and from whence she had journeyed towards Philæ by the path that led directly along the shore and passed over the cliffs.

She and her companions had now returned by an easier, but more circuitous route, winding round the eastern side of the hills. At this village the Arab escort took their leave, and returned to the desert, which was to them more home-like and familiar than towns or villages, or any settled haunts of more civilized men.

The following day they engaged a boat to convey them to Thebes; but the little vessel was too light and narrow to admit of Cleon's much-valued horse being carried in it. He was, therefore, at his earnest request, allowed to ride the spirited little animal along the shore, attended by Indah, and generally keeping in sight of the passengers in the boat.

Cleon transferred to his Arab steed the name which he had himself borne in the camp; and Selim became his pride, his delight, and his petted companion. After the manner of Arab horses, he appeared fully to return his young master's affection, and to recognise his authority. It was a pretty sight to see the boy caressing the gentle creature, who bent his head to meet the little outstretched hand, turned his mild bright eye at the sound of the childish voice, stood motionless for the young rider to

mount, and then bounded away along the bank of the river with the speed and lightness of an antelope. But even when at his greatest speed, the well-trained animal would stop at the slightest indication of his master's will, either by rein or voice ; and would return to meet the admiring Indah, who soon learned to consider himself the special guardian of both the horse and his rider.

Willingly would Cleon have continued this delightful mode of travelling ; but at Thebes, where Calanthe awaited them, a large boat or barge was procured ; and in this the gentle Selim found a berth. All the party, except Cleon—to whom the present was perfect happiness, and who had no anxieties for the future—were desirous to reach Alexandria without loss of time. They all felt how much depended upon their reception in that city ; and, in spite of their present enjoyment, and in spite of their doubts and fears for the future, they were all anxious to know what fate awaited them, and to use all possible efforts to avert the evils which they dreaded.

Alypius had not made any open avowal of his feelings towards Medora, but he had failed in his resolution to conceal them from her ; and consequently a certain embarrassment had arisen in her mind and manner. She feared to betray to him, she feared to acknowledge to herself, how entirely she sympathized with him in this, as well as in most of his other sentiments : and, therefore, she assumed, at times, a coldness which she certainly did not feel, and which rather perplexed the young Roman.

As the travellers floated down the Nile, they were again interested in the subsidence of its waters, as they had been, on

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CIRON FOLLOWS ALONG THE BANKS OF THE RIVER. - PAGE 239.

their upward voyage, by watching its rising, and the preparations for the welcome inundation. They observed that all the openings of the canals and dykes were now closed again, so as to prevent the water from returning to the bed of the river, as the wide-spread inundation retired. The irrigation of the fields would thus be greatly prolonged, and the fertilizing process perfected by the time that the ardent rays of an Egyptian sun had dried up the overflowing waters.

So rapidly and so effectually does the glowing heat effect this absorption, and so entirely is the moisture evaporated, that no fevers or other epidemic diseases are generated by the damp or the decaying vegetation. The surface of the earth is revived after its temporary immersion; and the land that was so lately a wide lake, is covered, in a miraculously short time, with a carpet of the richest green, and ornamented with flowers of every hue.

Cleon was never weary of gathering the blossoms that grew near the different spots where the boatmen drew to shore, and stopped for rest and refreshment. Their toil was very light in comparison with the labour that was required in ascending the river. Except when a north wind blew against them, they had little to do but to let the boat float down the stream, and to direct its course. But the Egyptian boatmen were—as they are now—an indolent race; and they loved to recline on the shore, around a large fire in the cool of the evening, and to sing their sweet but monotonous native airs.

It was pleasant also to the travellers to leave the barge and wander on the shore. Sometimes Selim also disembarked; and he and Cleon got rid of their superfluous spirits by a gallop

along the flat margin of the Nile. Sometimes the horse was tethered in some sheltered spot, and allowed to graze the luxuriant herbage that sprang up, even to the very edge of the water. Then Cleon would amuse himself with weaving wreaths of flowers and creeping plants, and adorning the neck of his favourite with the fragrant and graceful garlands ; or he would form chaplets, and crown the heads of his mother, Calanthe, and Medora ; while Alypius looked on approvingly, or even ventured to assist him.

One evening Medora accompanied the child to a spot at some little distance from the landing-place, where some flowers of peculiar beauty were growing on a bank that sloped towards the river. Alypius was not invited to accompany them ; indeed Medora had seemed to repel his attentions all that day, and not to desire his society.

Sadly and silently he remained beside Claudia, who read his feelings, and pitied him.

"Let us follow my boy and Medora," she said, rising from her seat on the soft turf. "I do not like Cleon to be out of my sight : he is so wild and thoughtless, and I see they are going on round that promontory. I am always fancying danger for him ; though I try to remember all the mercy which has been extended to him and to me, and to trust that the same Almighty arm will continue to protect him."

"He is a noble boy, Claudia," replied Alypius ; "and you may well be proud of him, and prize him highly. So much simple, earnest faith, so much firmness of purpose, combined with such artless, childlike manners, and sweetness of disposition, I never imagined could exist in one so young. Medora

loves him almost as fondly as you do. Claudia, I envy the boy her affection."

Claudia smiled with grateful and glistening eyes. She loved to hear the praises of her child; but just now she was thinking of Alypius, and smiling at his envy of Cleon. She thought that if he were to read Medora's heart as plainly as she fancied she could do, he would be well content with the degree of interest with which he had inspired her sister. But she did not dare to tell him so; she only said, laughing—

"You must envy no one, Alypius: but indeed I see not why you should envy my little Cleon the affection of his aunt. It would not please you to be regarded as he is."

"O Claudia, you know that her favour is the object of my most fervent desire. I thought at one time that she did feel some interest in me. When first we spoke of our Christian faith, and our Christian hopes, there was a sympathy between us that rejoiced my soul. But now she has grown capricious, or at least uncertain. Sometimes she shows me all her former confidence; and then again she seems to avoid me, or scarcely to be conscious of my presence. Day by day, as we approach nearer to Alexandria, she becomes more cold and distant."

"Dear Alypius," said Claudia gently, "it pains me to remind you of our father's declared intentions with regard to Medora; but it is necessary that you should both of you bear them in mind. I do not think that he will actually force my poor sister to espouse the idolater Muthis——"

Alypius started, and shivered as she said those words.

"He shall not, he dare not!" he exclaimed. "No, that Egyptian shall never be the husband of Medora!"


"Calm yourself, Alypius," replied Claudia, soothingly. "I believe, as I was saying, that my father will not compel Medora to become the bride of Muthis. But will he ever admit a Christian into his family? Will he so far overcome the prejudices which caused my banishment and all my long years of sorrow, as to sanction your seeking Medora's hand? I fear not, even though my mother would be your warm friend. I fear that patience, and faith, and courage will all be called for."

"Claudia, I could wait with patience, and I could act in faith, and I could endure with courage—yes, for years—if only I could be assured that Medora's heart were mine; and that she would prize my devotion, and return my love."

"Do not despair, Alypius," said Claudia; and she smiled again encouragingly.



CHAPTER XXVII.

T this moment Claudia and Alypius passed round the low cliff which had hidden Medora and her little nephew from their sight. They saw them seated on a bank, with a multitude of flowers around them, and busily engaged in forming a chaplet of lotus blossoms.

Suddenly Cleon, who sat at Medora's feet, uttered a cry of alarm, and attempted to rise, calling on his aunt to do the same. But the boy's foot slipped, and he fell again on the grassy bank; and as he did so, Medora beheld the opening jaws and fearful rows of teeth of a large crocodile rise above the water. She seized Cleon, and snatched him from the ground just as the voracious creature was about to close his jaws on the child's leg. She turned to fly, but the teeth of the crocodile had seized the hem of her flowing robe, and she could not escape.

With admirable presence of mind she placed Cleon on the bank as far as she could reach from the savage monster, and implored him to escape; but the brave boy only caught hold of the skirt of her dress, and strove with all his might to drag it from the jaws of the crocodile.

It was a fearful struggle, and must have ended in the destruction of one or both of the intended victims, had not help been sent by the Lord.

Claudia and Alypius saw the dreadful contest; they saw

Medora fall to the ground, and the crocodile commence a retreat towards the river, dragging both her and the still clinging boy after him.

Sooner than under other circumstances he could himself have thought possible, Alypius was on the spot, followed by the agonised Claudia. His sharp dagger was unsheathed in his hand, and, without pausing for one instant, he caught hold of Medora's dress, and dealt a furious blow at the head of the crocodile.

The keen blade entered the eye of the infuriated brute, but the wound was not mortal. The great jaws opened, and Cleon snatched Medora's robe away, and liberated her from their grasp : but they closed again on the left arm of Alypius, and cut it to the bone.

"Thank God, she is safe !" were the only words that escaped his lips as he felt himself drawn towards the water. He had but one chance of escaping a cruel death, and he tried it manfully. No efforts of the terrified sisters and the brave young Cleon could save him. He was dragged into the river ; and his dagger was his only hope. In spite of the agony he was enduring, he struck so well and so forcibly at the head of the creature, that its hold relaxed, and he tore his bleeding arm from its jaws and struck out for the bank.

All the party stood a moment on the brink of the river, and watched the dying monster sink deep into the water. They deeply felt the peril from which they had been rescued, and all were inwardly thanking the God who had so wonderfully interposed for their preservation. Their hearts were lifted up in fervent gratitude together, as Claudia reverently said,

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MEDORA IN DANGER.—PAGE 244.

"Surely our God is a faithful and a merciful God. He is the helper of all them that put their trust in him. May this great preservation lead us to love him more fervently, and strive more earnestly to serve and please him, and to glorify his holy name, for Jesus Christ's sake."

"The Lord grant that it may be so!" replied Alypius. "I have most to be thankful for, as I was permitted to be the means of saving Medora."

"And my brave little Cleon too," said Claudia, as she clasped the child in her arms, and tears of joy ran down her cheeks.

Medora had not spoken—she could not speak, for her heart was swelling with emotion; and she feared to betray all that she felt towards her gallant preserver, and all the painful sympathy which the sight of his lacerated arm aroused in her breast.

Tears were in her eyes, and her voice was low and trembling, as she at length approached Alypius, and laid her hand on his arm, and said—

"After God, I must thank you, Alypius. But for your courage and promptitude, I shudder to think what would now have been my fate, and perhaps also the fate of that noble boy. We must think of you only now, Alypius. We must hasten back to the boat, and do our best to relieve your sufferings." Then she added in a low voice, as if speaking to herself, "And I was the cause of them!"

These words reached the quick ear of Alypius, and a throb of joy passed through his heart, and a bright flush rose to his pale cheek. It did not long remain there; for excitement, severe pain, and loss of blood, had overpowered his strength, and it was evident to his companions that he could hardly support himself.

"You are faint!" exclaimed Medora, hastily. "Lean on me, Alypius;" and she placed his hand on her shoulder, and moved gently forwards, while Claudia gave him her arm on the other side, and little Cleon picked up the bloody dagger, that had fallen to the ground, and carried it in admiring triumph.

Thus the party proceeded towards the boat; and Alypius was so well contented with the order of march, that it is possible he made the most of his temporary weakness, and advanced with slower steps than were absolutely necessary, in order to prolong it. The boat was, however, reached at length; and then Claudia and Medora exerted all their medical skill, and made the best of their scanty supplies, in order to dress the gaping wounds which the sharp fangs of the crocodile had inflicted.

Never was a patient more gentle and tractable than Alypius. He submitted his arm to the gentle hands of his nurses, and even smiled at their fears of giving him pain. When the operation was at length completed, and the arm was bound up and slung in a scarf of Medora's, Alypius looked happier and more contented than either of his attendants had ever seen him.

No more excursions were made, and no more adventures befel the travellers on their voyage. Indeed, Alypius did not recover his usual health and strength so rapidly as he and his friends had anticipated. He was often even obliged to rest on a couch beneath the awning of the barge, and listen to the conversation of his friends, in which he took little part. The heat was still very great by day, and the wounds in his arm were so deep and jagged, that they could not heal rapidly, and caused him continual pain and great helplessness. But

Alypius would not have complained if the voyage had lasted for an unlimited time.

But all sublunary things, both pleasant and painful, must come to an end. The travellers were approaching Memphis, from whence they were to pursue their journey to Alexandria by land, and it was their last evening of boat-life on the Nile.

They were all rather sad and pensive. The present was very peaceful and enjoyable, but they knew not what the future would be; only they looked for trials and troubles, which seemed to increase in magnitude as they drew nearer, and they tried to prepare to meet them with firmness and resignation.

"Medora," said Claudia, breaking a long silence, "I should like to hear that song which you sang to us the last evening that we spent at Philæ. We were then at a very important crisis of our lives, and our gracious God carried us through all the dangers that threatened us. We are now approaching another crisis, on which, humanly speaking, the happiness of all our future lives depends. Let us lift up our hearts and our voices to the Lord our God in that noble hymn which you used to sing to a heathen deity. The prayers and praises therein addressed to Osiris are only due to our God and Saviour, and to him we will dedicate them."

Cleon brought Medora's lyre, and as she took it she said, "I have for some time addressed that hymn to the Lord Jesus, and omitted all allusion to Osiris. I could not sing it to the praise of a mere man, when once I had learned in whom to believe as the Incarnate God, even the man Christ Jesus."

Medora raised her eyes toward heaven as she spoke, and her face glowed with unwonted enthusiasm. Then she struck her

lyre and sang a kind of chant, which was originally intended to ascribe that divine honour and glory which belong to Jehovah alone, to the dead Osiris, and to supplicate from him preservation and blessings that the Creator of heaven and earth alone could bestow. Now the words and the melody were consecrated to a nobler service, which rose up from Christian hearts and Christian lips as the friends joined in chorus. Their spirits were refreshed by the holy exercise, and they conversed more cheerfully and hopefully after this expression of confidence in the God in whom alone they now put any trust.

"Medora," said Alypius, earnestly and thoughtfully, "you will not shrink from acknowledging your Redeemer in the house of your still unbelieving father? You will not, surely, let him believe that you are still a worshipper of the gods of Egypt, and share the faith which Muthis professes?"

He looked searchingly into her countenance as he spoke; and if he had still any doubt as to her firmness and constancy, those doubts must have been all dispelled by the expression which he read there.

"No," she said, "I will never act the part of a hypocrite. That which I firmly believe I must openly profess, be the consequences what they may. Fear never deterred me from professing my devotion to Isis and Osiris, whom now I know to have been no gods, but only senseless idols. Others despised my divinities as antiquated and effete: they paid their worship to Jupiter and Juno, and all the gods of Olympus, and they ridiculed my steadfast belief in the gods of Egypt; but they did not change my faith, or lead me to conceal it. I was true to my false gods—I would have been true to them even unto

death, if I had kept my former belief in their divinity. And now that I have found Him who is my Redeemer, my Saviour, and my Almighty God, shall I fear to confess him before men? Never!"

How beautiful she looked! How did the expression of holy faith illuminate her delicate and regular features! Certainly Alypius thought he had never, either at Rome or at Milan, seen picture or statue to be compared to the spiritual loveliness of her face, or to the grace and dignity of her form and attitude.


Medora had spoken rapidly, and expressed the earnest feelings of her soul with far more freedom than she was in the habit of doing in the presence of Alypius; and when she saw his eyes fixed upon her with admiration and deep joy, she blushed at her own enthusiasm, and sat down beside Claudia to recover her wonted composure.

"The Lord bless you and strengthen you, Medora," said Alypius, fervently. "May he give you grace to be faithful to him in sorrow or in joy, and may he make your way plain before your face."

"He will, Alypius,—he will surely do so," said Claudia, cheeringly; for she saw a sad and desponding look returning to the young man's countenance. "I believe," she added in a whisper, "that the evils we fear will be removed. I believe that Medora will be free and happy; and I even venture to believe that you will eventually be permitted to share, and to add to her happiness. Be of good courage."

"God bless you, dear Claudia, and fulfil all your most sanguine hopes. I will not despair."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

N the stately dwelling of Sophis there was gloom and anxiety. The master of the house lay on a bed of sickness ; the physicians had failed to give relief to his bodily sufferings, and the priests had equally failed to bring peace to his anxious and perturbed spirit. His mind was vexed by disappointment. Muthis, the object of his hopes and schemes, his intended wealthy and powerful son-in-law, had deceived him. His pride and his selfish feelings were wounded, and the wound rankled as he lay helplessly on his carved and inlaid couch, with its richly embroidered hangings.

It will be remembered that when Claudia and Alypius arrived at Alexandria from Tagaste, they found Marcella alone, and Sophis gone on a political mission to Constantinople. The ostensible object of this mission related to some of the taxes levied by the Roman government on the city of Alexandria.

But Sophis had likewise some ambitious projects. He desired to occupy a position of importance in the government of Alexandria which was likely soon to become vacant ; and he hoped that, by undertaking the mission to Constantinople, he should ingratiate himself with the prefect, and so obtain the object of his wishes.

But Muthis happened to have the very same desire that had

for years dwelt in the mind of Sophis. He also wished to occupy the coveted position, which he considered himself more worthy to fill than his intended father-in-law. The temporary absence of Sophis from the city would, he hoped, greatly facilitate his schemes, and for that reason he was doubly anxious that he should go to Constantinople.

No sooner had he departed than the false friend entered on his political intrigues; and he not only used all his endeavours to obtain the desired situation for himself, but he did not hesitate also to cast serious aspersions on the character and qualifications of Sophis, in order to prevent his appointment.

It happened that Julius, the friend and fellow-student of Alypius, often met Muthis in the society of some other young men of Alexandria. They had long been acquainted, and there was something quick and caustic in the manner of Julius that attracted Muthis, and led to a considerable degree of intimacy between them. He entrusted him with his schemes for his own aggrandizement, and the disappointment of Sophis, whom he did not scruple to ridicule as pompous and self-sufficient.

Julius listened to all his confidences; and, being rather of a wily disposition, drew from him all he could extract of his plans and projects, and joined in his ridicule of Sophis, in order to prevent any suspicion as to his real intentions.

But Julius was not devoid of generous and friendly feelings. He had a sincere regard for his former fellow-student and companion, Alypius, of whose interest in Medora he was well aware. He also was not unmindful of the kindness and hospitality which had been shown to him by Marcella; and which

had been continued, more for his friend's sake than for his own, ever since the departure of Alypius from Alexandria.

He was, therefore, resolved that the treachery of Muthis towards Sophis should not be allowed to succeed. He knew that Medora had been sent to Philæ, in order to remove her from all Christian influence, and place her in the very atmosphere of idolatry and fanaticism; and he knew that she was only to return to Alexandria to be united to Muthis. And, though he did not know that Alypius had returned to Egypt, and had gone to the sacred island in pursuit of the Egyptian maiden, he was yet determined to use all the means in his power to save Medora from the miserable fate that threatened her.

He therefore continued his apparently friendly intercourse with the deceitful Muthis, and encouraged his confidence; only awaiting the return of Sophis to expose to him the true character of his proposed son-in-law.

Meanwhile Sophis proceeded on his embassy; and on his arrival at the Eastern capital, was immediately honoured with an interview with the emperor.

To all his political remonstrances he met with a gracious hearing; and a prompt redress of all the grievances which were justly complained of by his Alexandrian subjects, was promised by Theodosius. But when Sophis attempted to gain a promise of the appointment when it should have become vacant, he was surprised to find that he had been forestalled, that unfavourable representations had been made respecting him, and that the post was destined for another.

Sophis was dismayed. He saw that it would be worse than

useless to urge his request any further ; and he set out on his homeward journey greatly dejected and crestfallen.

The fatigue of the journey, to which he was little accustomed, joined to his disappointed feelings, were too much for the strength of Sophis. He was attacked by fever, and reached his home in a very depressed and enfeebled state.

If he had only had the disease to combat, it is probable that his strong constitution would, ere long, have overcome it. But immediately after his arrival at Alexandria, Julius waited on him, and communicated to him all the deceitful conduct and the cruel intentions of the man in whom he had placed entire confidence. The shock and the disappointment had a serious effect on the weakened frame of Sophis. He sent for the treacherous Muthis, and charged him with his ungenerous conduct, from which he vainly endeavoured to clear himself. He was dismissed from the presence of his former friend and benefactor, and warned never again to attempt to enter his dwelling.

Great would have been the joy and gratitude of Marcella at this unlooked-for termination of all her fears for her beloved child, had not her satisfaction been mingled with fears and anxieties for her husband. From the time of Sophis's interview with Muthis, he became decidedly worse and weaker ; and soon he was confined to his bed, where he lay, sadly musing on the past, and with gloomy forebodings for the future.


Such was the state of affairs when Claudia and her companions reached Alexandria.

She and her sister went at once to her father's house, taking Cleon and Pyrrha with them, and also Calanthe ; and

hoping that Sophis, might not yet have returned from Constantinople; but that they might find Marcella alone, and have time to confer with her on their future proceedings. Alypius was compelled to leave them before they came in sight of Sophis's dwelling; and sad was his heart as he parted with Medora, not knowing when, or under what circumstances, he might see her again. It would have comforted him if he had known all that she felt as she took leave of him. Her spirit was sorely tried by desponding fears, and she was almost tempted to despair. But she would not give way; and she mastered her emotion, to her own surprise and Claudia's admiration—possibly to the disappointment of Alypius. He turned away, and sought the abode of his friend Julius; while Indah and Yanina went to seek a lodging for themselves in a retired part of the city, with which the latter was well acquainted.



CHAPTER XXIX.

S Alypius approached the home of his friend, he met him; and great was the surprise and pleasure with which he was greeted by Julius.

“Why, my friend!” he exclaimed, as he seized his hand, and held it with energy. “Have you indeed ventured back to Alexandria? I fear you are like the silly moths, that come fluttering round a flaming torch—your wings will surely be singed. I warn you,” he continued, with mock gravity, “to fly the danger while yet there is time. The fair Medora is lovelier than ever; though—if I judge rightly from outward appearances—she is less happy than when you knew her. She is absent at present: her fanatical old father sent her to Philæ, to prevent her mother from making a Christian of her, and to revive her love for the old-fashioned gods of Egypt—of whom, I fancy, she had begun to weary. I am delighted to see you, my dear Alypius; but I will be disinterested, and entreat you to leave Alexandria before the syren returns.”

In spite of his cares and anxieties, Alypius could not help being amused at his friend’s off-hand manner, and his brief epitome of Medora’s recent feelings and proceedings—with all of which he was himself so much more accurately acquainted.

He smiled; and then, as he was about to reply, Julius

observed for the first time that his arm was in a sling, and also that his features were pale and somewhat wan.

"What is the meaning of all this, Alypius?" he inquired, with much concern. "Have you been engaged in the Italian wars, and got wounded, either for or against the last usurper?"

"The enemy that I have been fighting with was no European," replied Alypius, laughing. "But the wounds which I got were deep, and they are still unhealed. I am very weary, Julius. Let us enter your lodging; and there you shall hear my story, and also tell me yours."

We will leave them to their friendly converse, during which Alypius heard much that gave him the most profound satisfaction, and filled his heart with new and joyful hopes; and we will follow the sisters to their paternal home, and tell of the reception which they there met with.

Marcella greeted them with the most affectionate joy and thankfulness; and greatly were these feelings enhanced when her little grandson was presented to her, and she heard the story of his recovery from the Arabs. She also gave a kindly welcome to Calanthe, and begged her to continue her guest until she might wish to return to Tagaste.

But sorrow was the prevailing feeling in Marcella's heart. The state of Sophis filled her with alarm; she saw that his strength was gradually declining, and the thought of his leaving the world with no better hopes than those which Egyptian mythology could furnish, was anguish to her pious and believing soul.

Gently and earnestly had she endeavoured, since his illness

had become serious, to lead him to lay aside his prejudices, and listen to the blessed and glorious story of man's redemption. From no one but his wife would Sophis have borne even the slightest comparison between his gods and the God of the Christians. But he loved Marcella as fondly as his nature was capable of loving anything ; and, in his weakness and weariness, he suffered her to go on unchecked.

Sophis had hated the Christian religion without ever inquiring into its authenticity or its doctrines. Much, therefore, that Marcella told him was altogether new to him, and aroused an unlooked-for interest in his mind.

The bitter sense of disappointment which the conduct of Muthis had caused him, also led him to listen with less repugnance to all that his gentle and faithful wife, who had never deceived him, pressed on his attention so affectionately and so earnestly. Still Sophis did not confess that his confidence in his ancient deities was shaken ; and he continued to lament the intended measures of the Roman emperor for the suppression of their worship.

All that Marcella had yet obtained from him was an admission that her religion might be true to a certain extent—as, indeed, he had always admitted of other forms of paganism differing from his own. And this admission encouraged her to speak of Claudia, and of her union with a Christian, and to urge upon him that this was not an unpardonable crime.

At first the mention of his banished child caused his brows to contract, and the old stern expression to return to his emaciated countenance. But when Marcella pleaded, even with tears, for the pardon of their daughter, he relented so far as to say that if

she should ever return to his home during his lifetime, he would see her, and hear all she had to say in extenuation of her conduct. This was indeed balm to the sorrowing heart of the Christian mother; and earnestly did she pray that Claudia and Medora also might arrive in time to see their father. Her prayer was heard; and even before she had dared to hope for their return, she beheld them enter her apartment.

After a brief conversation, in which she told them of their father's sad and increasing illness, and of all her hopes and fears, she hastened to the chamber of Sophis, to prepare him for the exciting interview.

Sophis was greatly moved: his daily-increasing illness had softened his feelings, and all the love he had once borne towards his eldest child now returned. He desired to see both his daughters immediately. As Claudia hastened to obey the summons, and bent down over his couch, and tears flowed down her cheeks, he folded her in a fond embrace. Cleon he also received with kindness, and regarded him with evident pride and pleasure: he was, indeed, a child to inspire such feelings in the breast of any parent, and Sophis looked on him as a worthy descendant of his noble race.

Medora had stood apart, and watched with intense interest and satisfaction the reception accorded to her sister and nephew. She felt very doubtful as to her own welcome; for she knew nothing of what had occurred between Muthis and her father, and she still supposed herself to be pledged by the word of Sophis to be the pagan's bride. That pledge she was determined never to ratify; not even if banishment or death

were to be the consequence of her refusal. And, with this conscious feeling of rebellion against her father's authority, came a sense of hypocrisy in approaching him as she had ever hitherto done, and asking his blessing.

There was also another feeling which withheld Medora from her father's bedside. She knew that she was not only a rebel against his declared will, but that she was also a deserter of his gods, and was thus disappointing all his most cherished hopes in more ways than one.

She drew her mother aside; and, while Sophis was still occupied with Claudia and his grandson, she said in a low voice :

"Mother, I must tell him all. I cannot meet my father's eye, and listen to his words of kindness, without first undeceiving him with regard to all I am, and all that I am resolved to do."

"Not yet, Medora—not yet," replied Marcella. "It is not needful that you should say anything on that a gitating subject at present. Your father has been greatly tried; and what has been the greatest joy to me, will be a cause of grief to him. He is not prepared to hear that you also are a Christian."

Marcella's natural weakness and timidity prompted the remonstrance; but Medora was of another spirit, and she could not temporize at such a moment.

"I cannot defer my confession, mother," she said, respectfully but earnestly. "I must know my fate; and may the Lord help me to meet it!"

Then she approached the couch on which Sophis lay. He

had observed her speaking to Marcella, and his eyes were now fixed on her, as if waiting what she had to say.

Medora knelt down beside the low couch, and took her father's wasted hand in both her own, and looked at him with a pleading and deprecating expression that touched his heart.

"Father," she said softly, "do not address me as your daughter before I have told you all the inward feelings of my heart. If then you can forgive me, my soul will bless you and rejoice. But if not, if I am too deeply grieving and offending you, then must I be an exile from my home and from you; for never can I change my feelings or my convictions."

Sophis looked amazed; but his habitual self-command did not now desert him. He only replied calmly :

"Go on, Medora; I am prepared to listen to you."

The calmness of his face reassured Medora, and she proceeded with more composure :

"My father, you declared to me that I could only return to my home on the condition that I should perform your promise to Muthis. But I have ventured to return. I have escaped with Claudia from the dangers that threatened us at Philæ; and here, on my knees, I implore you to pardon me, when I tell you that I cannot fulfil your promise—I cannot be the wife of Muthis. No, father," she continued more earnestly, "I would die any death rather than be united to that man. Hear me yet," she said hastily, as she saw that Sophis was about to speak. "Hear me yet, for I have more to confess. It is not only my dislike to Muthis which now actuates me in my rejection of his hand: I could not wed an idolater when I myself am a Christian."

Then she bowed down her head on her father's hand, and he felt the warm tears falling on it.

Suffering and disappointment have a wonderful effect in softening some hearts. They had acted thus beneficially on the heart of Sophis. He did not upbraid his child ; he did not cast her from him. He only said, in a low and sorrowful voice :

"And you too, Medora, have you renounced your father's gods? But you are my daughter still ; and no one will now take you from me. Muthis has proved himself a deceiver and a traitor ; he has been guilty of the basest ingratitude ; and I have cast him off for ever. You will never see him again beneath this roof."

"Thank God !" exclaimed Medora, fervently. Then, turning to Claudia, she said : "You were right, my sister. The Lord has indeed removed all our difficulties in a wonderful manner. He has done far more for us than we either expected or deserved."

The party that gathered around the bed of Sophis that evening were happier and more peaceful than they could have anticipated. The heaviest anxiety that pressed upon their hearts was the dread of losing the husband and father, who was now dearer to them than he had ever been.

They spoke of all that had befallen Claudia ; and Sophis showed a lively interest in her past sufferings, and in all she told him of Cleon, and of the young Icilius, who had, for a time, almost supplied his place in her affections. He seemed much struck by the fact of Cleon having retained the faith which he had learned from his mother through all the period of his wanderings with the Arabs ; and the steadfastness and for-


titude of the young martyr Icilius, evidently inspired him with admiration, and even with respect.

The next day Marcella heard him questioning the boy as to his belief, and drawing from him all that he could tell of the story of Jesus Christ, and the doctrines and precepts of the gospel.

Very touching was it to listen to the child's simple but earnest remarks. He did not know that he was teaching the dying idolater : he only thought that his grandfather was testing his knowledge, and proving his faith ; and he therefore replied with perfect ease and confidence. But the Lord was blessing his simple words, and carrying them into the depths of the old man's darkened soul. Sophis would listen to Cleon as he would not to any other Christian speaker ; and the boy could say things to him which no one else would have ventured to utter ; and the truth which he spoke with childish lips, was the means which God used to break down the ignorance, and prejudice, and unbelief which had so long reigned in the mind of the learned and intelligent Egyptian.



CHAPTER XXX.

T was not enough for the happiness of either Claudia or her sister that their father had welcomed them kindly, and had forgiven their offences : it was necessary that Alypius also should find favour in his sight before their satisfaction could be complete.

It was evident that the days of Sophis on earth were already numbered, and that what he had to do, whether of a spiritual or a temporal nature, must be done quickly.

Hitherto Sophis had only known Alypius as a young and talented Roman student, a friend of Julius, and an acquaintance of Orestes. Marcella now undertook to speak of him to her husband as a Christian convert, as the preserver of Medora from the danger which threatened her at Philæ, and also from the cruel death which, but for his courage and promptitude, would have been her fate on the shore of the Nile.

Sophis listened very patiently to all that his wife had to say in praise of Alypius, so long as he thought Marcella only looked upon him as the friend and fellow-traveller of Claudia, and the brave guardian of both their daughters. He expressed his readiness to see him, and to tender his thanks for all his important services ; and he begged Marcella to invite him to the house without loss of time.

But Marcella had more to say of her young friend and fellow-

Christian. She felt that it would be unfair to him, and deceitful towards her husband, if she were to admit Alypius to the home of Medora, and thus encourage his fondest hopes, while Sophis remained ignorant of his pretensions to his daughter's favour, and might be decidedly opposed to them.

She therefore openly declared to him all that she knew of Alypius's long attachment to Medora, and all that she believed of his present hopes and fears. For this Sophis was by no means prepared ; and his habitual sternness of manner returned for a time, to the great discomfiture of the anxious Marcella.

Just then little Cleon entered the room, and, running up to his grandmother, he eagerly exclaimed—

“ Why may not Alypius come into this house, and see my mother and Medora ? I have just seen him walking outside the gates, and he looked so pale and ill ; and he said his arm was very painful, but that it was something else that made him feel so ill. I asked him to come in ; for I was sure my aunt would soon make him well, as she used to do in the barge. But he said he must not enter this house until he had permission. May I run after him, and bring him in to rest ? ”

Marcella looked anxiously and imploringly at her husband, but she did not speak. Then Cleon turned to his grandfather, and, taking hold of his wasted hand, he said—

“ Pray let me bring Alypius in : he is such a friend of mine, and such a friend of Medora's too. You know, grandfather, that he saved both our lives ; for I would never have let go my hold of her dress, and the crocodile would have eaten us both up. And I love him so much, and my mother loves him, and Medora loves him—and you must love him too.”

The child's sweet, pleading face was very lovely, and very persuasive: it did more than the most elaborate arguments could have done.

"Go, my boy," said Sophis, gently, "go and bring your friend to me."

Cleon bounded out of the room, and Sophis followed his graceful young form with admiring eyes.

"That is a noble boy," he said to Marcella; "I could refuse him nothing. The man who saved his life, and that of our beloved child, deserves much gratitude from us. I will speak with him alone, Marcella, and endeavour to ascertain how I can show my sense of the obligation under which he has laid us."

"There is one way, dear Sophis," replied his wife, "and I believe only one, by which you can recompense Alypius. Let him plead his own cause, and ask his own reward."

She left the apartment filled with joyful hopes and anticipations as regarded Medora's future happiness, and she hastened to seek Claudia, that she might tell how well her mission had sped, and also how opportune and successful Cleon's interruption had proved.

What was her surprise, on entering the room usually occupied by the family, at seeing Orestes there! Her first feeling was one of joy and thankfulness, for she had greatly desired his presence since his father's illness had become so alarming; but this feeling was considerably damped when she remembered his strong prejudices against Christianity, and the violent opposition which he would certainly make to her cherished plans for his sister.

He was in earnest conversation with Claudia and Medora, and

for a few moments Marcella's entrance was unobserved. She paused at the threshold to collect her thoughts, and to consider what course she should pursue in order to soothe and conciliate her bigoted son, when she heard Medora say, very quietly and firmly—

“I am His servant, Orestes, and I must declare it. My Redeemer and my God has said, ‘Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven; but he that shall deny me before men shall be denied before my Father, and before the angels which are in heaven.’”

“Medora,” replied her brother, gravely, but not angrily, “I suspected this when I found that you had fled with Claudia and Alypius; and my suspicions were confirmed when I recalled to mind some of our recent conversations, and also several changes in your manner and conduct with regard to the worship in which you formerly were so zealous. I will not reproach you; though it saddens me to reflect how many of my family have forsaken the religion of our fathers, and how the old national zeal and devotion is everywhere fading away.”

He would have proceeded, but Marcella came forward, and greeted him more cordially than she might have done, if she had not heard the mild tone in which he had answered Medora's bold confession of faith.

“Tell me, Orestes,” she said, “why have you left Philæ at this season, when so many solemn ceremonies are wont to be observed?”

Orestes hesitated. He was unwilling to own that he had abandoned the priestly office which he held in the grand temple

of Osiris, and had left the sacred island, probably never to return thither.

Presently he said—

“I am here, mother, because those whom I looked on as my brethren have dared to suspect my truth and fidelity. The priests of Philæ were furiously exasperated when they found that two Christians had intruded into the holy island, and even had entered the temple ; but when they became aware that these followers of the Nazarene had escaped their intended vengeance, and had also carried off Medora and Pyrrha, and two of the temple servants, their rage knew no bounds. I could not express any regret that my sisters had been delivered from their cruel hands ; and therefore they accused me of conniving at, and even assisting, their flight. Had I done so, I should have been fully justified, for I have never sanctioned cruelty ; but I was innocent of the charge, as I was also of any infidelity towards the gods of Egypt. I indignantly rejected their accusations, and I retorted upon them their inhumanity, their avarice, and their ambition. Then I proved their treachery. My friend, Manethes, warned me of the danger which threatened me, as he had previously warned me of the peril to which Claudia and Alypius were exposed ; and I left the island. I love the faith in which I have lived, and in which I hope to die ; but I hate and despise the treachery and the cruelty of some who profess to serve the gods, but who only serve themselves, and seek for their own aggrandizement.”

Orestes had seldom expressed himself so vehemently, or displayed such strong feelings. His mother and sisters were astonished, but they were not displeased ; for they hoped that

his disgust with his priestly brethren might in due time lead him to a more unprejudiced comparison between the religion that sanctioned their conduct, and the pure, and holy, and self-denying doctrines and precepts of the gospel. This was not, however, a time to urge this comparison upon the offended Orestes—it must be deferred to a more fitting opportunity.

Marcella's present care was to secure for Alypius a kindly reception, not only from her husband, but from her son likewise. She told Orestes of all that he had done and suffered in Medora's defence since he had assisted in her escape from Philæ; she dwelt on his noble and generous character, which she had discerned and appreciated even at the time of their first acquaintance; and then, observing that he manifested no displeasure at her praises of the brave young Christian, she mentioned that Sophis had desired an interview with him, and had sent Cleon to bring him to his presence.

This intelligence caused a considerable perturbation in the breasts of the audience; and Marcella watched each countenance, and read with interest the various feelings which were there depicted. On Claudia's features she saw an expression of unmingled pleasure and satisfaction. She rejoiced in the fact just announced, and she also rejoiced that her darling Cleon had been the means of bringing it to pass.

Medora's countenance expressed a greater mixture of feelings. There was joy, unmistakable joy, at the thought of Alypius being admitted into her father's house; there was embarrassment at the consciousness that her mother and sister, and perhaps her brother also, were observing her evident emotion;

and there was fear, anxious fear, as to what might be the consequences of the impending interview.

Orestes was more accustomed to conceal and suppress his feelings than his sisters were; but the mother's eye read great anxiety and great determination in his face. He rose up from his seat and said,—

“I must see my father. From Claudia's account of his weakened state of health, I feel sure that he is not equal to conversing with a stranger and a foreigner such as the Roman student.”

He laid an ominous emphasis on the words “stranger and foreigner,” and as he did so he fixed a searching glance on Medora's blushing face and downcast eyes; and then he left the room to assist at the conference in his father's chamber.

It was a long one; at least it appeared so to the three ladies who remained in the saloon, and tried to appear unconcerned, and to occupy themselves with their embroidery, and with indifferent conversation.

We will not repeat all that passed by the bedside of Sophis. Suffice it to say, that a full avowal of his sentiments, his hopes, and his prospects was made by Alypius, and listened to by Sophis with a patience and serenity that were utterly incomprehensible, and by no means agreeable to his son.

Still the habitual reverence which Orestes had ever paid to his father kept him silent; until Alypius actually ventured to ask for the hand of Medora, whom he regarded as the affianced bride of his friend Muthis.

Then he could be silent no longer; and he indignantly asked

Alypius whether he did not know that his sister was betrothed to a noble and wealthy Egyptian ?

What was his astonishment, we might add his burning shame, when Sophis interrupted him, and told him the story of Muthis's treachery, and his cruel schemes ! " What ! " he exclaimed bitterly, " all in whom I trusted—have all deceived me ? I will put no more confidence in man ! "

Then he left the room ; and soon returned, leading Medora by the hand, followed by Marcella, Claudia, and Cleon.


He approached Alypius, who stood amazed at the unlooked-for aspect of affairs, and said :

" Alypius, you are brave, and I am willing to believe you true. You Christians have, at least, the character of being firm and faithful. You have saved the life of my sister at the peril of your own ; and you are worthy to take the place of the dastard who has forfeited all claim to her. Father," he added, turning to Sophis, who was looking on very complacently, " it is your privilege to bestow the hand of your daughter."

He placed the trembling hand of Medora in that of Sophis, who drew Alypius towards him, and then, joining the hands of the amazed, but happy pair, said fervently : " May the one true God, whatever be his name on earth, or his dwelling above the sky, bless and preserve you both."

" So be it ! " responded all who stood around the couch of the dying man ; for, so far, all were agreed in belief.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OME months had elapsed since the scene which we have just described; and the family of Sophis had laid aside the garments of mourning which they had worn for his death.

They were now arrayed in festive attire, all but Marcella, who still wore the outward signs of her deep and heartfelt grief. She had, however, much cause for thankfulness and comfort in reflecting on the change which she had seen in her husband before his death, and in the hope of meeting him in a better world.

She did not "sorrow for him as those without hope;" and, therefore, she was able to wear a cheerful countenance on the day that was appointed for the baptism, and also for the marriage, of her beloved Medora.

Calanthe, who had returned home immediately on the arrival of the travellers in Alexandria at the close of their eventful voyage, had come from Tagaste to be present at the ceremonies; and Augustine had accompanied her, at the urgent request of Alypius, his chosen friend, in order to officiate at both the solemn services.

Very solemn they were, though very simple; and deeply were all who assisted at them impressed by the devout manner of Augustine, and the touching prayer which he offered.

In this feeling even Orestes shared. He had consented to be present ; and to his mother's great joy, she saw that he was evidently affected. In her heart she fervently thanked God for this small gleam of hope ; and she as fervently prayed for more. May we not hope that her prayer was heard and eventually answered !

There was a bridal feast that day in Marcella's dwelling. It was a very happy one ; though not either very magnificent, or very numerously attended. Excepting Alypius's faithful friend Julius, and a few Christians who were well known to Marcella, no one had been invited beyond the family circle.

While they sat around the table, and listened to the eloquent and interesting conversation of Augustine, a sudden tumult was heard in the outer court. It rose and increased ; and cries of distress and terror reached the ears of the astonished guests. The male part of the company started to their feet, and were about to hasten to the spot, when Jather, the Nubian slave, rushed into the banquet room, and exclaimed :

"Save yourselves, all ye that are Christians ! There is a band of murderers, led by Muthis, in the court below. They are furious for Christian blood ! O fly, dear mistress, with your daughters and your friends, to your own apartment. We can defend the entrance, and you will be safe there."

Alypius threw his arm around his bride, and hurried her away, followed by Orestes, who compelled his mother, and all the other ladies, to seek the same retreat. The door was secured, and Jather was placed outside as guard and sentinel, armed with a heavy sword, which he well knew how to use.

Orestes and Alypius then hastened to the scene of the dis-

turbance, accompanied by Augustine and Julius, and the few other men of the party.

They beheld a band of ruffians, led by Muthis, whose countenance was distorted by passion, and who brandished a dagger already stained with Christian blood. The slaves and other members of Marcella's household were bravely resisting the attempts of these fanatics to enter the dwelling; and several of them were already wounded in the struggle.

"Down with the Christians! Death to the worshippers of the Jewish malefactor!" cried Muthis, as he saw Orestes come forth at the head of the guests.

The cry was taken up by his bloodthirsty band; and a rush was made towards the party who stood in the open vestibule. The keen, searching eyes of Muthis fell on Alypius, and they flashed with the infuriate rage of a tiger. He sprang forward to reach the object of his vengeance and jealousy, hoping to plunge his dagger into his heart. But the hand of friendship was quicker than the hand of hatred. Julius saw the action of the Egyptian; and, as Muthis raised his arm to strike the fatal blow, he stabbed him in the side with his well-aimed poniard. With a shriek of rage and pain the baffled murderer fell to the ground, and was trampled under the feet of his own followers, before they could check their course. But as soon as they knew that their leader was dead, they drew back, and attempted to escape. Small hope would they have had of preserving their lives, had not Augustine interceded in their behalf. He entreated for mercy on the misguided fanatics. He implored and he commanded the Christians to desist from vengeance; and he succeeded at length in restoring silence, and putting an

end to the conflict. Then he addressed the attacking party ; and, with all the eloquence for which he was famed, he strove to bring them to shame and repentance for their deeds of violence and blood. At his request, Orestes allowed the miscreants to retire unharmed ; but a report of that day's outbreak was sent by him to the Emperor Theodosius, and his decision was awaited before the fate of the insurgents was finally fixed.

It was found that many Christians had been slain in different parts of the city before the murderous band directed their steps to Marcella's dwelling. But the Christian emperor declared that he would not suffer the glory of their martyrdom to be sullied with any executions ; and that he would pardon the murderers in the hope of their future repentance and conversion. At the same time he decreed the utter destruction of the magnificent temple of Serapis, from whose votaries the bloody insurrection had arisen.

There was a famous image in the great temple, which was the object of peculiar reverence to the idolaters. They even gave out that if any unbeliever should presume to lay a finger upon it, the earth would open, the heavens would be dissolved, and all nature be reduced to its original state of chaos.

Even the Christians were not free from superstitious dread at the prophecy, and for some time no man dared to lift his hand against the idol. At length a soldier was found courageous enough to try the reality of this awful denunciation. With an axe he cleft the head of the image down to the jaws, when, instead of the fearful catastrophe which had been pre-

dicted, the bystanders only beheld a number of mice issue from the breach that had been made!

Serapis—another name for Osiris—was then hewn into pieces, and the work of destruction proceeded. All the temples in Alexandria were demolished, and the pagans began to find that their gods were no longer worthy of adoration or of confidence, for that they could not defend either themselves or their long-honoured shrines.

We will not enter on the history of the suppression of idolatry and the rapid spread of Christianity which marked this particular period, and changed Egypt from a scene of darkness, and paganism, and cruelty, into a garden of the Lord, where the gospel flourished in a most remarkable manner.

We will only say that of all the converts of whom we have spoken, not one fell away from the faith and practice of true Christianity.

Even Orestes, the bigoted priest of Osiris, felt the influence of Christian example. He left Alexandria, in order that, away from all disturbing influences, he might inquire into and seek for the truth. Parting from his friends, he said :

“The gods of Egypt are expiring. They can no longer protect themselves or their followers. I must seek a more enduring religion. If I become convinced that you have found it, I will return to my own country, and become one of you—whose faith I have so long despised, but whose practice puts paganism to shame.”



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